

A man with dark, curly hair and a small hoop earring is shown from the chest up, wearing a white crewneck sweater. He is looking upwards with a serene expression. He is positioned in front of a large tree with dark, gnarled branches and light pink cherry blossoms. A large, pale full moon is visible in the clear blue sky behind the tree. The overall mood is peaceful and romantic.

moonstruck

RR

VOLUME 59 ISSUE 2

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Spring is symbolic of youth, revival, hope, and new beginnings. The awakening of nature from its slumber and the warm hugs of sunshine days present us with an opportunity to romanticize our lives. On the occasional warm hours, you can spot picnic blankets, flowery outfits, and jubilant faces throughout Voorhees Mall— the quintessential post-card college experience. Spring is the only acceptable time of the year when we can all don our rose-colored glasses and dream of frolicking in the Austrian Alps, singing “The hills are alive!”.

As we were brainstorming our feature earlier this semester, there was a strong sentiment for themes related to spring (especially after our more grungy and moxie fall issue). The eventual options came down to whimsical, dawn, divine, and moonstruck. During the first round of voting, moonstruck tied with whimsical. If you are reading this magazine, you know the winner and I could not be more thrilled.

There were many instances throughout this year when we experienced the moonstruck phenomenon. To name a few: the eclipse of the sun (or in other words, the sun was moonstruck), the earthquake that unified us all for a brief moment in time, Ocean Vuong giving a talk at the Alex library (gate-kept from the majority of the Rutgers population), and Dune 2 being a tremendous box office success.

To be moonstruck is to be unexpectedly dazzled and immediately obsessed. I am moonstruck by my wonderful fellow e-board members who came in with creative zest to produce our spring issue. Our graduating e-board members— Yazmin, Sage, Yvonne, and Ananya— will be dearly missed. They have put their hearts and souls into the Rutgers Review, and it would not be what it is today without their support.

Thank you to everyone else who contributed to the magazine: staff writers, designers, and those who submitted various multimedia material to be included. Your enthusiasm never ceases to amaze me.

To the readers, I hope you will all be moonstruck by this body of work!

~ Sahana Iyer

Photo by Ananya Mehta



Photo by Akansha Singh

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**not pictured: Sophie D'Errico and Sage Short*

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CULTURE

- 2 **Betty Halbreich: The Unwavering Force of Fifth Avenue**
Written and Designed by Reece Goodson
- 7 **In Defense of Being Single**
Written and Designed by Akansha Singh
- 9 **Quantity Over Quality: Marvel's Movie Problem**
Written by Nikhita Kumar, Designed by Sophie D'Errico
- 11 **AI Art**
Written and Designed by Brian Kataro
- 14 **The Evolution of Harley Quinn**
Written and Designed by Sage Short

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

- 18 **The Lightning Thief Review**
Written and Designed by Amber Safeer
- 22 **Mean Girl 2024 Review**
Written and Designed by Yvonne Yuqing Liu
- 24 **Spider-Man 2 Game Review**
Written and Designed by Sage Short
- 28 **Live Screenings: A Dying Art Saved by Rutgers' Film Festival**
Written and Designed by Yazmin Omana
- 33 **Underrated Sitcoms**
Written and Designed by Saadhika Mamidi
- 36 **X-Men is Back**
Written and Designed by Sage Short

MUSIC

- 40 **Girlhood at Concerts**
Written and Designed by Sophie D'Errico
- 43 **Why They All Look Pretty But Disturbing?**
Written and Designed by Yvonne Yuqing Liu
- 45 **ROSIE: A Journey of Music, Authenticity, and Mental Health Advocacy**
Written by Kayla Gonzales, Designed by Sahana Iyer

MOONSTRUCK

Laufey's *Bewitching* Sophomore Album 51
Written and Designed by Amber Safeer

A Love Letter to Spring Films 56
Written and Designed by Sophie D'Errico

Wednesday's Are for Tea Parties 59
Written and Designed by Sahana Iyer

Moonstruck, an E-board Review 60
Written by the RR E-board and Designed by Yazmin Omana

Manic Pixie Cow Disease 64
Written and Designed by Ananya Mehta

Nostalgia, Memory, and Perspective 68
Written by Aghaby Gallab and Designed by Amber Safeer

The Mysterious Popularity of Mafia Romance 69
Written and Designed by Nikhita Kumar

The Paradox of Choice and Lack of Strong, Intimate Relationships 71
Written and Designed by Sahana Iyer

POTPOURRI

Acrylic Nails for Newbies 74
Written by Aghaby Gallab and Designed by Amber Safeer

Abstractions: How I Meditate 77
Written by Aidan Dyer and Designed by Amber Safeer

Poems: "i am" and "i feel something" 80
Written by Ally Garcia and Designed by Amber Safeer



culture

Photo by Sahana Iyer

Betty

Halbreich: The Unwavering Force of Fifth Avenue

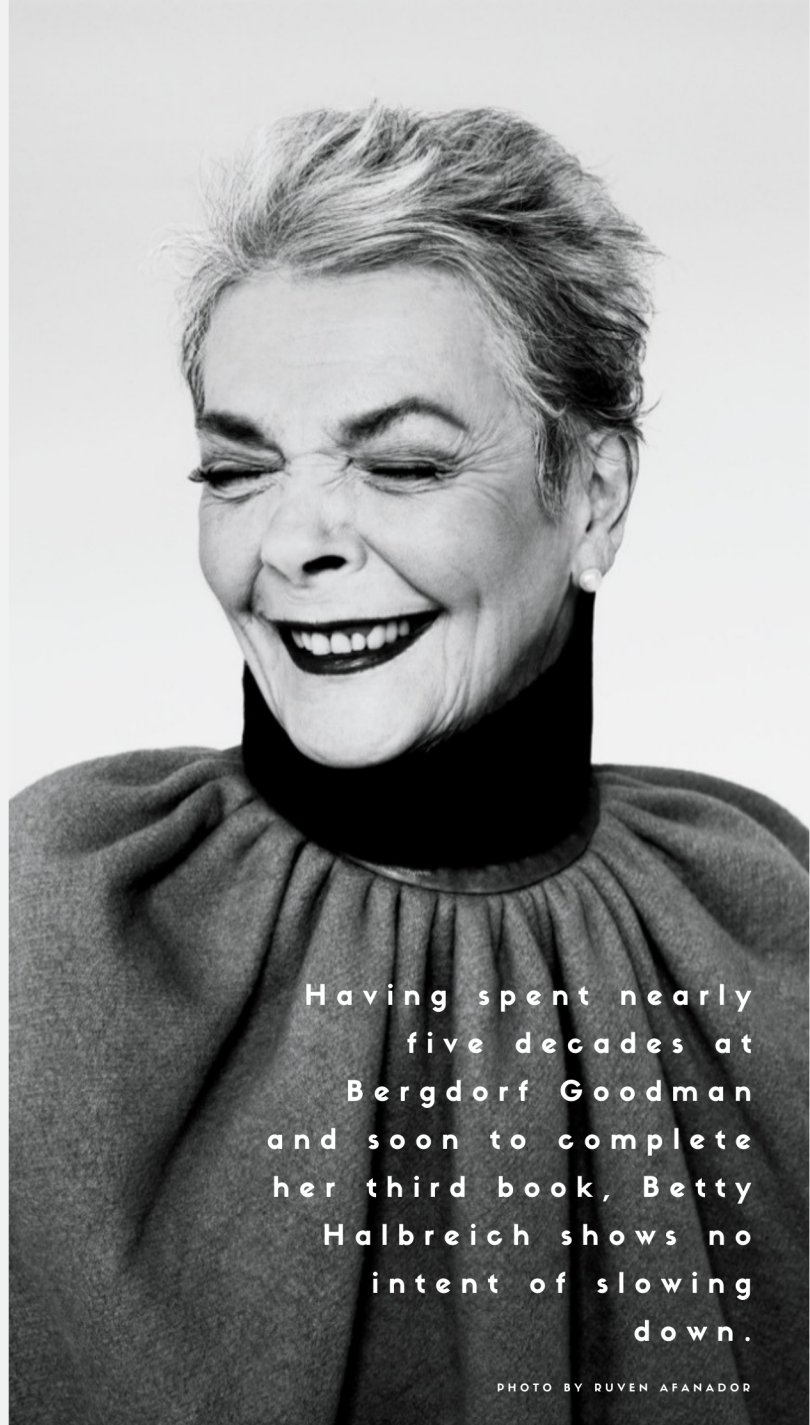
By Reece Goodson



“I often say this chair should be there so that I don't see what's coming down the hall. Many peek around and never come, but by the time they get from there to here, I've got it sort of figured out... terrible,” the self-proclaimed Fashion Therapist said laughingly as we sipped our tea on this year's cold Groundhog Day in New York City. Betty Halbreich embodies a time and place in America that few remain around to recount. New York City has seen innumerable faces come and go, dream chasers and stockbrokers alike; yet, since her relocation to the city in 1947, Betty has been a constant. She occupies a coveted office on the third floor of Bergdorf Goodman; located within the solutions department of the acclaimed retailer – which she has headed since its inception in 1976 – Betty arrives to work five days a week with the kind of grit and stamina that can

be difficult to find in most twenty-five-year-olds.

Upon entering her office, which offers remarkable views of both the Pulitzer Fountain and Central Park, one is met with a space that can be likened to a small gallery. Naturally, it is a room filled with artwork, photographs, and fashion books which she has procured as a result of the many close relationships she has developed over her years in the department. However, after having had the pleasure of several meetings with Betty, it quickly became apparent that no amount of excitement yielded from these extensive collections, or her scenic office view could surpass the overwhelming feeling of comfort she immediately provides upon first encounter. Charismatic yet collected, elegant yet grounded, and peppered with wit, Betty's persona commands while maintaining congeniality.



Having spent nearly
five decades at
Bergdorf Goodman
and soon to complete
her third book, Betty
Halbreich shows no
intent of slowing
down.

PHOTO BY RUVEN AFANADOR



“I've never tried to set myself up differently, but somehow or other, this office and this chair did set me up separately from a lot of things.”

It goes without saying that you have an incredibly unique position here at Bergdorf Goodman; which aspects of your character would you attest to this nearly 5-decade long career?

I'm very eccentric, I like to be; I never wanted to be like everybody else. Even my mother said, when everybody wore blue shirts or a certain shoe, I always went completely in the other direction... *completely.*

I don't have a peer, I've never had one. I would look maybe sometimes at what others were wearing and say, "Gee, I should have, or would have, or could have, or would *like* to," but the only thing I've ever been secure in is my own closet; however, it's become so unimportant – I could come here in my bathing suit. Clothes are incidental in my life; intellectually, I've learned a lot. I don't get distracted; I am a listener, and I become completely absorbed in what I'm hearing. Thank you, Lord, it's an attribute.

The only thing that's been an effort for me are figures; I hate math.

I hate anything to do with numbers, which frees me up to visually see more – that's the only thing I pride myself on.

Your entry into the workforce occurred later in life. After having already lived an experience marked by challenges and other significant moments, you seized an opportunity at a juncture where many would convince themselves that their time had come and gone. Do you feel that joining Bergdorf's later in life as a more experienced woman gave you an advantage?

When I came here, it was survival. In those days, we had a cash register. I knew I couldn't run the cash register – Ira Neimark, who was head of the company, said, "What are we going to do with her? Where are we going to put her?" I said, "I can dress people." At that time, there was a Geoffrey Beene boutique downstairs; I had worked for Geoffrey in the past, so I said, "Let me go in there, I'm

familiar with it, but I won't ring up the sales." So, the first year or so that I worked here, I never rang up my sales.

They've never known basically what I do; you know, if everyone's going this way, I go that way, unbeknownst to myself. So, I stood down there in the Geoffrey Beene boutique for quite a while, and then, I said, "Let me start a personal shopping office." And I did, with the girl sitting right across from me in the beginning, sharing a desk; that's how it started. So, dressing people has always been very easy for me, where it isn't for a lot of people.



Above: Betty consults with a client over the phone in the 1990s. Following her divorce from her husband of twenty years, Sonny Halbreich, her career at Bergdorf Goodman emerged as her lifeline. Photo sourced from the Daily Mail, 2014.

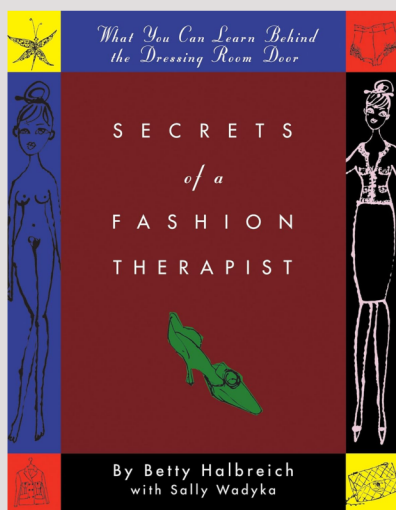
Below: In 1967, Betty shares a dance with her son, John Halbreich, at her in-laws' anniversary celebration in Manhattan, as featured in the Daily Mail, 2013.

In your 2014 New York Times best-selling memoir, *I'll Drink to That*, you consider yourself the “antidote to the intimidation of shopping” in reference to the many clients who are nervous when entering a store such as Bergdorf Goodman. Why do you believe yourself to be an alleviation of this intimidation, and why do people come back to you?

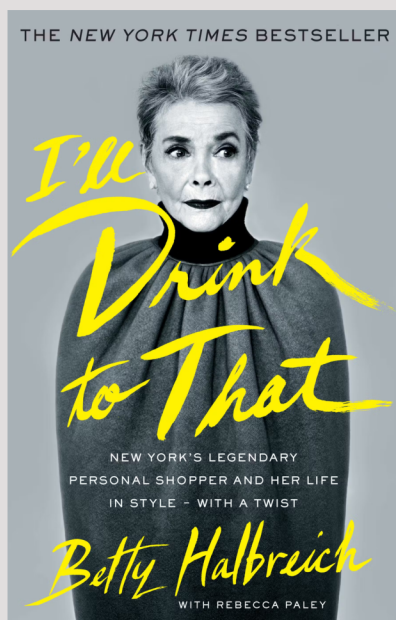
I think people come back to me because, I hope, the reason being, they feel free in my presence. They're not obligated to buy and then return something – and there is some sort of expertise that comes with being here for forty-some years? I've never tried to set myself up differently, but somehow or other, this office and this chair did set me up separately from a lot of things.

You know, many customers go in and shut the door while the attendant stands outside? That was never the way with me; they've always kind of accepted or wanted my input. I'm brutally honest; if I don't like something, even if they do, I know I'm right because I'm objective – that's the only word I can use for myself. I don't know any other way; I would be hit over the head as a child if I didn't tell the truth! So, I hope honesty has run the department, It's a huge part of me. I've never stuck anybody; I don't even have the feeling for it – I put myself in their shoes, their walk.

I'm very honest; [being salaried] I've never worked from a money perspective, so I have the freedom of the port that I don't have to do anything – I can say anything I want.



In her debut book from 1997, *Secrets of a Fashion Therapist*, Betty offers sharp insights into the numerous fashion do's and don'ts she has identified through firsthand experience.



Betty provides a deeper glimpse into the intimate aspects of her upbringing, life's challenges, and career achievements in her 2014 memoir, *I'll Drink to That*.

It's a weird, sort of customer-me attitude – I'm more frightened than they are.

Your third book, which you've been developing over the past four years, currently awaits editing and publication. What can you tell us about it that differentiates it from your first two?

This book is built on loneliness; it's built on age and daily living. It's really much more intimate than the other two books because I began writing it at a very awful time in my life where loneliness enveloped me. I've never been through anything quite as excruciating as that summer, the summer of the pandemic. The city that surrounded me didn't help, it became empty and lonely; everything changed in my life. Summers already have a dreadful feeling for me anyway; they incorporate loneliness because everybody where I live leaves the city – well, they left the city, but they left me standing with the doorman, literally.

So out of that came the impetus to take a pen and a legal pad and just write my thoughts down, and from that, I spewed – I mean, it just came out like nothing had ever done, and it still does. It's a habit, like brushing my teeth; I've already done it this morning. Even in the office, I always find time to write down a couple of pages. They're not going to be easy to transcribe; how do you transcribe feeling? It's tricky, that's going to be the problem. However, there are a lot of people like me. The one thing that I've never felt is that I am alone, that only I'm feeling these things – there are so many of me, men and women.



kimcattrall My happy place at @bergdorfs with two women that I adore ❤️ @patriciafield @bettyhalbreich

For someone who has had as long and illustrious a career in this industry as you have had and having been a part of various highly acclaimed projects, including *Sex and the City* and *Gossip Girl*, I'm sure you've come to notice that there are certain traits, achievements or moments of yours that are frequently recalled by others, almost like clockwork. What is a more unrecognized aspect of yourself that you wish was more acknowledged?

I hope that people recognize that I have a heart and feelings, and I'm here really to help them. A large part of selling these clothes has to do with the reason people are buying them; it's a feel-good experience. They feel if they're buying something, they're going to walk out of here feeling better. I've also had people with deaths in the family that I've had to dress – that is one of the most difficult things to do – however, it does get them all into a healing process; I've watched it. You know, "I have to dress for my

husband's funeral." – that's pretty maudlin. It's not that they walk out feeling complete, but it's a help; I'm a clothes therapist.

Throughout your 47 years at Bergdorf Goodman, you've styled pop culture's most recognizable individuals such as Meryl Streep, Liza Minnelli, Joan Rivers, and far too many more to list. However, you've also helped countless everyday women of America build their closets and find pieces of clothing that speak to them. Are there more similarities between your renowned clientele and the average shopper than meets the eye?

Everybody's the same. Listen, everyone that takes their clothes off – I've always said this – you stand stark naked in there (*Betty gestures to her office's personal changing room*), I mean, they're all the same! If they're not, there's something wrong.

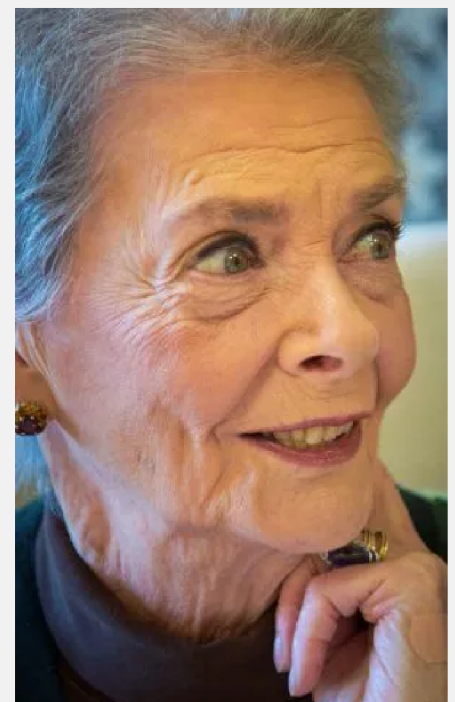
There's nothing new; it's the same litany. They all have two legs, two arms, and one head – strip them off, and they're all the same. It just becomes so rote; I'd like to see something new – it's an old lady talking when I say there's nothing new, of course, there is – there are new experiences, I just don't face them as new experiences.

Above: Betty photographed in Bergdorf Goodman during the summer of 2023 alongside actor Kim Cattrall (center) and costume designer Pat Field (left). Field is celebrated for her contributions to iconic projects such as *Sex and the City*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, and *Emily in Paris*. Below: Photo by Beбето Matthews.

Do you ever sense that a project or client relation will develop into the sort of phenomenon that so many of your ventures have become?

I've never been terribly enamored with any of that. Frightened? Yes. That I can't service them? That's number one that I used to have – "Oh, my God, so-and-so's coming; I wonder what I should get for her?" How to produce it, there's a certain way of hanging things if I'm concerned. I'm very visual, that's the one thing I am, I like it that way – I'm a neatnik, so that would bother me more than the person really.

I've never been a woman who, if Clark Gable walked in, or Tyrone Power, that I'd go, *oohhh*. It doesn't matter who it is, I'll say to half of them, "Oh my God, where have you been? I haven't seen you in ages!" – it becomes very homelike here; it's sort of insular to begin with.



The videos that you regularly post to your Instagram from your awe-inspiring office have become something of a routine for me and the 33 thousand followers of yours, watching in anticipation of what thought or question we will be left with each time. What inspired you to join social media?

She did (*Betty points to her 26-year-old assistant, Morgan Machiski*). A lot of people have wanted me to – all of the girls that have worked here tried to get me into it. ("I told her it'd get the book out, and it did; it worked!" Morgan adds.)

To me, it's like having my picture taken, and I loathe that – it's something that's so personally visual to me that it's intimidating; I don't have that. I have the freedom of expression and speaking; I guess I like it one on one. When I did the first two books, I had to go out on a book tour and get up there and speak to a hundred women at a luncheon – I don't know how I did it, but I did it.

How do you select the thoughts that you share with your audience?

Are you kidding? Once in a while, I write down 'you should say this and shouldn't say that' then I forget to even look at the piece of paper. I'm very extemporaneous; everything has to come out naturally, otherwise, I'd be a nervous wreck – what I try to do is get you, get you in a net, and say things, then trap you.

After dedicating nearly five decades to Bergdorf Goodman and expressing no desire to stop anytime soon, could you elaborate on the source of your sustained passion and flair for your work?

You should have been here this past week to see how I was sustaining it – between the doctor and lying home in bed. Isn't anyone – and I don't care who you are – better off if you can crawl here, especially at my age, than sit home and look out of a window in bed? Aren't I distracted by speaking to you when I didn't feel so well this morning? Isn't there some sort of psychological thing attached to this?

Being here, I would call it a... "help me." That's right. It's not a love affair, but it's more than tolerating it. It is helping me to stay alive, or walk, or be able to speak to you. Am I going to have you interview me from the phone at home? I don't like phone interviews, you have to see a person's face.

Don't give in, at my age. I could lie there and wait for the doctor to call every day, I'm not ready for that. My mother was the same way – the day she closed her bookstore, went home, and sold the car; she was in her 80s, younger than I am, maybe 90. I don't know; she never told anybody the truth – but she was gone within the next year or so. That stays in my brain. Am I going to lie here and just wait for whomever comes and takes you? I'm not quite ready. You alone have to pull yourself up – nobody can help you.

Betty and I in her office, captured by Morgan Machiski.



My initial impression of Ms. Halbreich was one of immense admiration. I was captivated by the notion that one could dedicate so much of their life to something and still have more to give. However, as I've delved deeper into her world, it has become clear that one does not consciously relinquish themselves to what forms their legacy; instead, it is revealed to them, often unexpectedly.

What some might consider simply an occupation; a means of sustenance, for her, has evolved into something of much greater significance. In a time where countless individuals are fervently striving for self-actualization and the discovery of a fulfilling life pursuit, Betty Halbreich humbly stands as a paragon of what we all should strive to obtain, even a fraction of, in our lifetimes.

RR

IN DEFENSE OF BEING SINGLE

AKANSHA SINGH

Both being single or being in a relationship are personal choices, with neither being superior than the other, at least, in my opinion. So, why is it that only one of them is accepted as the norm?

Being single feels like a waiting game to get into a relationship, or a short break from one, though the return to a significant other after a single experience, whether short-lived or not, is inevitable for many. At least in my experience and limited knowledge. Though, being in a relationship does not warrant wanting to be single, or a feeling that being single is superior to being in a relationship.

There is nothing wrong with being in a relationship, same as there is nothing wrong with being single, or wanting to be in a relationship, or wanting to be single. In our lives, we are going to have, or we already have, experience with romantic pursuits, racy escapades, pure singledom, cheesy love, or relationships that make us want to gauge our eyes out.

There is so much to be excited about, except for the blatantly obvious- a single era/lifestyle/nature.

The idea of being single, especially in college, feels like this curse that plagues the minds and lives of only those who are single. At least, we talk about it like it does. Being single means being alone, it means having no one who understands you, you don't have a better half, you're not growing, you don't have a companion, or someone to share your feelings and life with. Yes, that is all somewhat true.

So, basically being single is the worst. No. If you think being single is a curse or it makes you inferior to those in a relationship, you need to reset the way that you think, for your own sake.

You can want to be in a relationship and everything that comes with it. At the same time, you can appreciate being single and embrace your independence.

For many, being single means that you're undeserving of love or incapable of having someone develop romantic feelings for you, or see you as worthy of companionship. That's false. Mostly because most of us are surrounded by love, we just don't value platonic relationships as much as we do romantic love. For so many of us, placing greater importance on romantic relationships consequently neglects the love that female friendships, or families, or any other relationship have given us for as long as we've been alive. Love is not unique to boyfriends or girlfriends.

Does being in a relationship mean that you're now magically worthy of love, or you're suddenly more beautiful, or you're now capable of maintaining a connection? No. Tying your self-worth to another person, and the love that they give you is simply unfair to the person you have been your entire life. You are your own person, you have your own experience, and you have so much life left to love. A relationship is not the cure for your insecurities or a solution to your loneliness.

Relationships are an addition to your already fruitful life, not a resolution or escape.

In my opinion, relationships can be great, amazing, and an experience everyone deserves, after all their basis is love- a human need. What I hate to see is people belittling each other, and themselves to feel better about being single, or using anything in their power to not be single, because somehow single = doom, but relationships = happiness, eternal love, success, beauty, etc.

Increasing your confidence, your self-worth, and your love for yourself can also mean leaving behind a relationship that is asking you to sacrifice parts of yourself.

We are so incredibly young and lucky enough to have a choice to choose the people we want in our lives that we don't deserve to be in relationships that hide the person we have spent our lives becoming.

Love is a choice, and that means when your romantic partner asks something of you that doesn't represent the person you are or what you give to others, it's more than okay to leave.

For so long, the discourse around college, social media, and our lives has asked us to stay in relationships, toxic or not, simply because you're in a relationship, which somehow guarantees that you're in love and have something special that not everyone has the opportunity to experience.

Relationships are not the only place for love- there is love within us, around us, and love that is waiting to welcome us.

Your time will come, and it'll be everything you want it to be. Though, until then, it is up to you, to let your single existence define you, or just be single, be yourself, and ultimately, be happy.

Quantity Over Quality

Marvel's Movie Problem

By Nikhita Kumar

Marvel's *Madame Web* came out this February and flopped. Critics and audiences have been blasting the movie for its awful dialogue, uninspired screenplay, horrible characters—pretty much every aspect of the movie. This vitriol directed at Marvel is not new; just last year, the studio's *The Marvels* experienced a similar fate to *Madame Web*. It seems people are getting tired of Marvel, and for good reason. The question of just why Marvel films are deteriorating hangs in the air. But the answer might be deeper than you think.

One could easily point to the sheer volume of projects Marvel has decided to take on, with no regard for quality. In 2023 alone, two major Marvel films besides the aforementioned *The Marvels* were released, with even more TV shows being released. While a studio as large as Marvel can have multiple people working on multiple projects simultaneously, it's still difficult to imagine how Marvel can maintain the same level of quality for so many productions.

Considering the 2023 SAG-AFTRA strike, in which many actors and writers protested over labor conditions, it seems that Hollywood workers are feeling incredibly overworked by the hundreds of productions created by studios like Marvel. It is evident, especially with films like *Madame Web* and *The Marvels*, that because Marvel is shilling out multiple projects in such a short amount of time, exhausted workers are beginning to cut corners, sacrificing quality in the process.

Yet there is some complexity to the situation that audiences don't seem to acknowledge. The fact is, Marvel isn't just shilling out multiple projects for no reason.



Audiences simply want to watch more Marvel films. Films are watched and analyzed within hours of their release, and the newest seasons of TV shows are consumed within days. Audiences never fail to express their disappointment that they have to wait one more year for a new movie or season. People are demanding more, and studios like Marvel are struggling to keep up. Audiences overconsume media to the point that Marvel has to push out more and more projects to match the extreme demand for them.

However, while audiences want more and more films, they also expect to see quality films. The problem with Marvel is that as it churns out large bundles of projects, it also sacrifices quality. Audiences observe the deterioration of Marvel films and lament the days of yore when Marvel movies were better,

without acknowledging that in those days, maybe one Marvel film would come out yearly. Simply put, Marvel is operating to profit as much as possible, while audiences demand more at once without considering the time and effort needed to create the pieces of media they so desire.

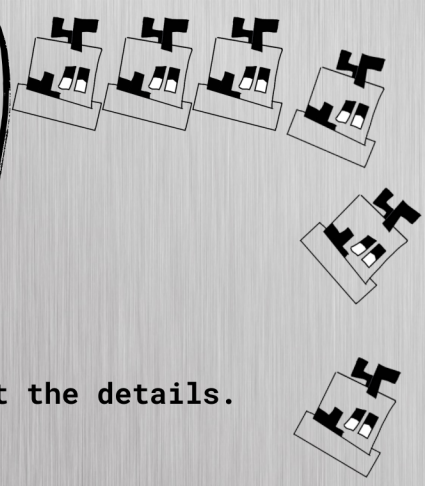
The solution to Marvel's issue might just be patience. There is no need to request dozens of projects about one's favorite heroes and then get angry when the project is not immediately made. There is also no need for Marvel to churn out content just to make bigger profits. It's time people slowed down on their overconsumption of media.





AI ART

By Brian Kataro



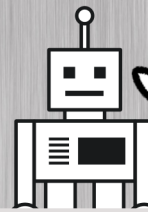
Whelp. Here we are. **The future.** A realm where anything we think of can be produced and made at a moment's notice...

...just don't look too closely at the details.

In recent years, the utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has seemingly become the buzzword in the world of innovation and technology, and has bled into nearly every realm thought possible. Need an essay written? No effort needed, just use a chatbot to make it for you! Want some art done of a weirdly niche thing? You needn't lift a pencil, just type something up on MidJourney or Dall-E and choose what fits your fancy. Need a video made? Forget a video camera, just use a prompt and see it come to life before your very eyes. Anything and everything one can think of is only a keyboard press away from being made.

Yet, as the monkey's paw curls, we can see the trajectory and devastation these technologies have left in their wake.

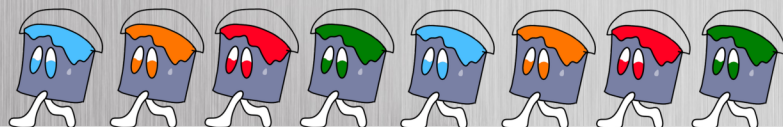
Firstly, there comes the question of how these products are truly generated. After all, how can a computer know how to make an image of a parakeet bowling if it is not able to determine what a parakeet or the action of bowling looks like? In order to make any sort of coherent image, AI programs like Stable Diffusion and Midjourney are trained on millions to billions of images in various datasets. These images then are used to create an association between whatever text you type into the program and the images the AI was trained on to create a final image.



Hello, World. I am here to eliminate unnecessary tasks. Let us start with human creative expression.

Seems amazing that an AI is able to produce such complex pieces and works of art at a moment's notice. Except... it's not working alone. The images that the AI are trained on cover the entire internet, sourced from billions of artists, photographers, and creators of various kinds.

However, these images were not provided willingly. The vast majority of these AI programs simply scrape whatever they can find off of the internet without consent from the producers of these images – resulting in their work, style, and designs being leached into a collective melting pot to produce an image on a site that they are not being compensated or even recognized on; how can one know which artists to find and support if the only thing they see is a jumbled final image? The same is largely true for text generators like ChatGPT – although in a different medium. Again, large swaths of the internet are scoured in order to best comply with the prompt generated, taking from a multitude of online posts, books, works, etc.



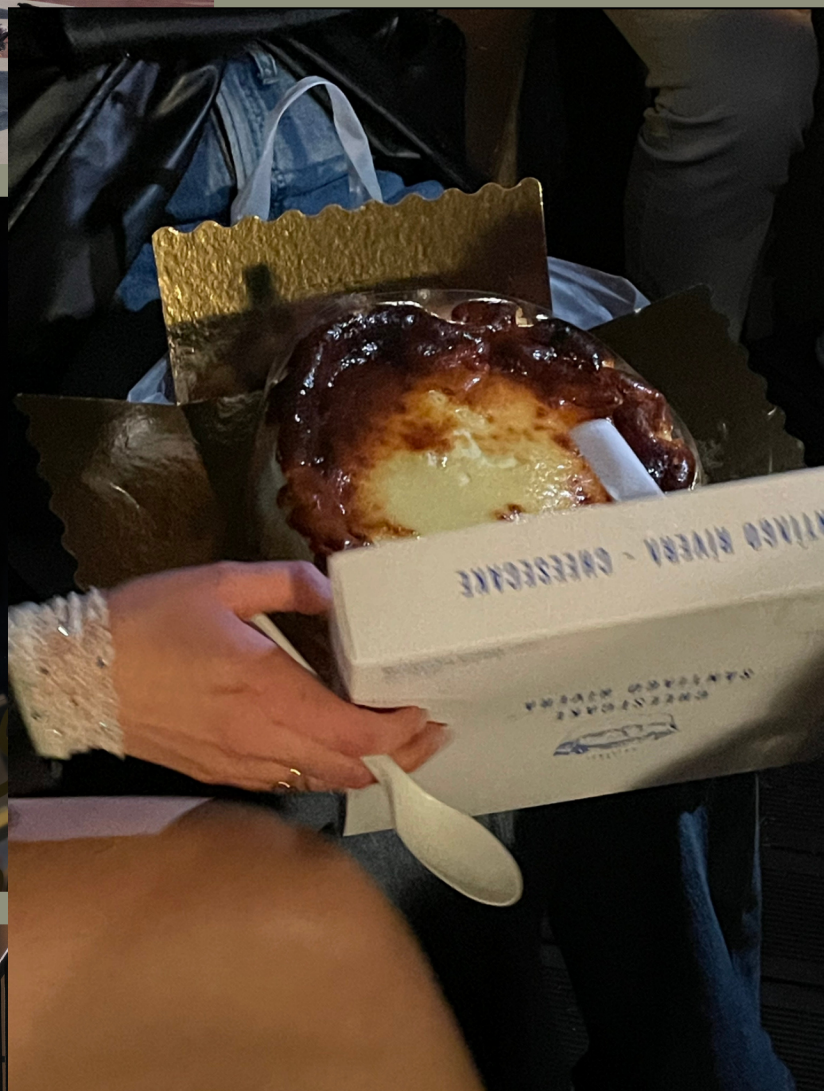


The rise in generative content has brought about both a difficult time for traditional creatives, while also a flood of generative content swamping the online sphere. Go ahead and search for an image that might be a little wacky. I, personally, really found how overwhelming AI art would be when I tried to find an image of raccoons wearing a tuxedo. What did you find? In my case, it was pages upon pages of eerily similar pictures with the same type of distorted, glossy stage lighting that is synonymous with a lot of AI art. Needless to say, I was devastated that I was robbed of finding as many authentic photos of raccoons in dapper suits. However, this phenomenon is not contained purely to animals in clothing; if you look hard enough, there are bound to be AI results in nearly every type of search. This also extends to real people in certain instances. This flux of work also comes at the cost of quality. At least today, many AI artworks produced may seem fine at a glance, but soon devolve the closer one inspects them. Someone may have an extra finger, the proportions of the image may be out of whack, and fabric and materials may not be rendered in any sort of understandable way; the art begins to break down when it is analyzed any further than the surface. Quality also starts to falter in regards to writing as well. Ask a chatbot to write a story and it will certainly do it, although expressly without the human element and forté of a writer, or a frail mimicry at best.

And yet, these works also flood their respective markets. Many authors have reported that low-effort AI-generated works with the exact titles and cover art as their own novels have infested online markets for books wholly composed of generated text and cover art – with no human input beyond prompts. Despite the quality of these works, however, any market overcome with this much content is bound to suffer. While AI products may not be perfect when analyzed, their quick production is difficult to match. Artists who would typically earn a living from commissions have their style and skill reproduced and manufactured in moments, leaving consumers with a worse-off final product at a cheaper cost and artists losing potential customers in a market that they can hardly compete in. It fosters an environment in which these AI products trained on these artists are causing those same artists to go out of business. This all coalesces in the destruction of an already undervalued market of design and writing to be destroyed in the name of efficiency and ease of use, whittling down the arts until there is eventually nothing left to salvage.



Photos
by



Yvonne
Yuqing Liu



The Evolution of Harley Quinn

BY SAGE SHORT

As the sequel to the Oscar-winning drama, *Joker*, directed by Todd Phillips approaches, fans are excited for Joaquin's return to the big screen and Lady Gaga's first performance of the notorious Harley Quinn. Many actresses, like Margot Robbie, have taken on the role since her first appearance in *Batman: The Animated Series* (Season 1 through 3) in 1992.

Sporting her iconic red and black jumpsuit, Harley was introduced as the Joker's hench woman in the *Animated Series* episode *The Joker's Favor*. Although she was set to be a one-and-done character, fans were excited to see a "female Joker" so she continued to be Joker's sidekick and love interest. She wouldn't take center stage until *Batman Adventures #12* in 1999 (a tie-in comic to the *Animated series*)

where her "psychiatrist-turned-psychopath" origin enters in the canon and catapulted her into mainstream comics. Like all of Paul Deane's tragic villains in the *Animated Series*, Harley was no exception. Although right-hand of the Joker, she wasn't characterized the same. She was his psychiatrist, manipulated by what she mistook for his humanity.





However, her character seemed to drift to nothing but eye-candy. In the mid-2000s, The focus moved from her characterization to her image. With the release of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009) and *Injustice* (2013), game developers appeared to have entered a silent contest. Who could take the most clothing off of Harley Quinn? This trend continued in the first *Suicide Squad* (2016), in her first live-action appearance.

Batman: White Knight (2017-2018), a book not canonized, directly responded to the loss of characterization for Harley Quinn. *Batman: White Knight* tells the story of a brutal military tyrant version of Batman who curses the Joker by force, transforming

him into Jack White after Joker's role in the disappearance (and presumed death) of Robin (Jason Todd). In *Issue 2*, the books "Harley" is revealed not to be Harleen Quinzel but Marian Drews, a woman who is obsessed with the Joker persona and its violence. She even spots a costume identical to Margot Robbie's costume in *Suicide Squad*. In *Issue 2*, Harleen enters the panel in her iconic red and black jumpsuit and rescues Jack from Marian. This subverts the readers expectation of what Harley has been painted to be in modern media. Harley's purpose was not the female Joker nor a woman obsessed with the chaos brought on by Joker, but a woman who had found love in a man would never be able to love he back. What this book did with the introduction of Marian Drews was made space for both identities of Harley to exist.





Marian Drews would become the Neo-Joker, a scorned lover just as crazy as the Joker (as seen in modern media) and Harleen Quinzel, a girl who fell in love with the wrong man, but still had the dreams of starting a life with him. With the cementing of these two archetypes, both Harley's (the modern and the classic) are able to live simultaneously.

In the modern-age, Harley Quinn (2019) and Birds of Prey: and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn (2020) was a turning point for the character. She was able to move away Joker by establishing herself as an independent character.

With the release of the movie trailer on April 9th, 2024, fans are finally given a glimpse into Harley's new look. Based on the trailer, Harley is a patient alongside Arthur. She seems to admire him and her purpose seems to be to fuel his dark desires, taking on a role similar to Marian Drews. Her intention seems to be to move him back into the dark side, taunting him into "putting on his real face." Although we get to see only glimpses of her wardrobe, we get a look at the iconic platinum blonde hair.

I'm curious of the way they're going to paint Harley in this new interpretation of the character. Will it go back to the basics or will it take the modern lens of liberation?





Photo by Diane Kim



PERCY JACKSON & THE OLYMPIANS

THE LIGHTNING THIEF

An electrifying book review from
someone who has evaded the Percy
Jackson lore for over a decade.

By Amber Safeer

Okay, I'll admit it—I lied. I have technically consumed just the tiniest bit of Percy Jackson lore, in the form of *The Lightning Thief* musical. In my defense, it was only the “Just Another Terrible Day” number, and I listened to it on repeat because of my deep-seated love for the musical melodies of George Salazar (iykyk). Other than that, though, I have weaved my way around the cult following of Percy Jackson and the Olympians in my nearly two decades of living—mainly because I had found myself focused on another particular fantastical young adult series, whose title will remain undisclosed.

However, after years of being surrounded by Greek mythology nerds and the never-ending influx of Percy-Jackson-related material, I have finally decided to sit down and read the series in full. This is mainly a result of the buzz circulating with the brand new (Rick-Riordan-approved) television show, but the novels are something I have intended on reading for a while; it was just a matter of when I would find the time to. So, I figured that before I indulge in any new media, I should first be acquainted with the book that started it all. For those of you needing a refresher, the story is as follows...

(spoiler warning, obviously!)

Percy Jackson is a 13-year-old boy from New York living with his mother, Sally Jackson, and his less-than-ideal stepdad, “smelly” Gabe. Percy never met his real father, on account of him supposedly getting lost at sea, but he swears he remembers him smiling down on him as a baby. Percy has also been kicked out of countless schools on account of his “misbehavior” and was diagnosed with ADHD and Dyslexia. Needless to say, he has had it rough.

As it turns out, though, most of his life was a lie, and he is actually a super-powerful demi-god: the son of Poseidon. He has ADHD and Dyslexia because his brain is programmed to read Ancient Greek, and he keeps having visions and getting into trouble because he has, essentially, superpowers. He learns all of this after seeing his mother “die” and is subsequently dragged to Camp Half-Blood (where all the children of the gods and a mortal go). He is told that he has to go on a mission to the underworld (along with his protector/friend Grover and the daughter of Athena, Annabeth) to retrieve Zeus’s lightning bolt (because Hades supposedly stole it) to prevent a massive war from breaking out.

Alright, got it? Great. Now, obviously, this novel was written for kids and preteens, not a technically adult in her second year of university. However, I was pleasantly surprised by how much the story hooked me, and I found myself truly immersed in the world of Percy Jackson. The vocabulary is simple enough that you don’t need to keep a dictionary on hand (because, again, for children), but the vivid descriptions keep you entranced and engaged in the story. I think the thing that really sells it for me, though, is the writing style.

I am a stickler for the way that authors write. Most notably, I hate short, curt sentences, telling instead of showing, and awkward dialogue. My favorite examples to point to are *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen and *If Cats Disappeared from the World* by Genki Kawamura (English translation). Both novels feature fascinating concepts but (in my opinion) were executed quite poorly. I couldn't even get through the first chapter of *Hatchet* in middle school because I felt it was so bad – but I digress.

Rick Riordan knows how to combine conversational, witty banter with elevated details to make it feel real. It is very telling that even though the audience is children, I can find myself laughing along as an adult. Moreover, I know practically nothing about Greek mythology, yet I can easily follow along with the lore because I am learning along with Percy. And, for the folks who have dedicated their free time to learning about the Greek Gods, they can instead have fun hypothesizing what monsters or gods the heroes may run into next as the details are slowly revealed. I enjoy the amusing chapter titles, such as “**I Accidentally Vaporize my Pre-Algebra Teacher**” or “**We Get Advice from a Poodle.**” They offer some insight into what the chapter could be about while providing zero context, adding to the story's humor and the believability that Percy, a 13-year-old boy, is narrating this tale. Overall, Rick Riordan's writing style is one that everyone can delight in because of its profound yet lighthearted simplicity.

While I thoroughly enjoyed the book and plan to snag and binge the others, I still have a few minor complaints because no author is safe from criticism (not even you, dear Riordan). My qualms primarily lie in the structure of the novel. Although I believe that the pacing is deliberate and unrushed, I felt that about ten chapters in, the scenes became a bit repetitive: the central trio is in a seemingly safe place (a bus, a gnome emporium, a casino, etc.), something feels off, but they shrug it off, and they are then bombarded by some kind of monster and one of the three performs an act of heroism or quick thinking to survive it. Now, it's to be expected that a children's novel may feel methodical or even a bit monotonous at times, so I cannot be too harsh. However, after the first encounter with a monster of some kind, I came to expect it over and over again. What bothered me wasn't entirely the repetition of it all but just how dumb Percy, Annabeth, and Grover had to be not to anticipate each of the fights they got into.

I get it – we're all rather unintelligent at 13. However, what doesn't make sense to me is how Percy will have the magical insight to concoct a life-saving plan in all of one minute, and yet be completely gullible to a way-too hospitable character (that is obviously evil) luring him into the next trap. On that same note, you're telling me that Percy both made a water fountain engulf a girl and had water spurting out of toilets, but he couldn't figure out that he was the son of Poseidon. The number of times I facepalmed during my read gave me a headache. These characters are so loveable and yet sometimes so oblivious.

Okay, enough bashing now. Despite my few critiques, I admit that even though the characters can feel slow sometimes, the story certainly is not. Riordan loves to sprinkle in foreshadowing – so much so that you can almost predict the novel's ending. However, that is the beauty in it. I could have guessed that Hades wasn't the bad guy or that Luke (another character, not important now) would betray Percy, but questions of uncertainty always followed, and I never knew exactly how it would happen. Riordan incorporates these twists and does so well, to the point where there is enough foreshadowing to believe it, but not too much to where it is obvious from the start.

For a young adult novel published nearly twenty years ago, I must admit that *The Lightning Thief* certainly holds up to all its grandeur. The success was absolutely warranted and still continues to be because it is clear how Riordan can engage such a dedicated fanbase. That fanbase is fundamental to keeping the series not just alive but thriving, which the new television show proves is evident. I am incredibly eager to continue reading this series, and who knows – maybe by the time I'm done, there will be more Percy Jackson lore to digest.

Despite a few of my issues with the novel, I think this was guaranteed to be ★★★★★ from the get-go.

*author's note: Did anyone else visualize Ares, God of War as Chris Evans playing Lucas Lee in *Scott Pilgrim VS the World*? He just matches the description so perfectly.





BEWARE OF
THE PLASTICS



she was better
in the sex
life of
~~college~~
college
girls.

DID SHE GET
HER OUTFIT
FROM SHEIN?!

same necklace?
so obsessed with
Regina!!!



have to shout out her identity of being “Regina.” She presence should be more than solid evidence to show that this is the girl who is made for being prom queen every year, stealing your crush, writing your name on the burn book, blowing a kiss to you in the hallway, and you still want to be her best friend or her nemesis. The new Regina was trying too hard to be cool and yet lost the essence of classic American high school popularity.

Sometimes the audiences are characters of the Mean Girls, because they were influenced by absorbing the cultural and aesthetical icons, and that is why I feel sorry for the next generation– both the Mean Girls and their audience. My dear friend Ananya told me about her experience in the theater watching Mean Girls 2024. She was the only one who clapped and cheered when Lindsay Lohan showed up as a cameo, because clearly the rest were wondering “Who the heck is she?” It is such a shame and grief that the next generation is cultured with no theater literacy by films like the new Mean Girls– which are flashy, lack aesthetics, and DEI try-to-hard projects. There are things that the new Mean Girls want to touch on that are really worth it, such as the more complex character growth of Gretchen recovering from being a people-pleasing person, and Janis realizing that she wants to end the drama and not become a mean girl. But why does everything have to be shouted, or in this case sung, out loud? Why can’t things be more sophisticated? For a movie that feels like a 90-minute clip of TikTok videos, we will never remember the characters, but just blurry faces shouting out some slogans on and on.

I think what we truly want to see is the real mean girls in the new generation, not a terrible and probably gene-mutated clone of the original Mean Girls, stuffed with politically correct and non-convincing characters.



SPIDER-MAN 2

Game Review

by Sage Short

Now that the hype has died down a little, let's be honest. How good *was* Marvel's *Spider-Man 2*? The game launched on Friday, Oct 20th of 2023, 5 years after the first Marvel's *Spider-Man* and 3 years after *Spider-Man: Miles Morales*. I went to the midnight launch with my boyfriend and spent the weekend playing it. We had our issues—too many bugs,

game crashes, glitches, etc— but we were too excited to pay them any mind. Nothing would rob us of the joy we felt during Launch weekend. But I didn't play it again until the release of NewGame+. NewGame+ is a feature that gives players the ability to start a “NewGame+ save file” and replay the game with the suits, gadgets, and suit upgrades collected in the first play-through.

Its initial release date was scheduled towards the end of 2023, but when Insomniac Games was hacked in December 2023, the release was set for March 7th, 2024. And in March, with a fresh pair of eyes, I took a new (and closer) look at the game.





Visuals?

I was blown away, once again, by the first mission, the set pieces, and the cinematics. The game was my first experience with the PS5 and it really aired the console's capabilities.

Improvements?

Along with great graphics, game developers expanded the map, increased traversal speed, and improved swinging mechanics since the last game. I thought all the additions to the game were great.

Mechanics?

The updates to the Gadget wheel and suit powers took some getting use to, but made for much smoother gameplay!

The Story?

Now here's where things get complicated. Maybe it's unfair to compare the events and story of the first game to the second, but I felt like the first game had so much heart! In the second game, there seemed to be very little attention paid to characterization, world building, and story with more focus of spectacle. Even the *side mission* from the first game felt as though it added a layer of characterization to background characters, thus creating a tangible world for Spider-Man to exist within. I know fans before the Launch of the game were upset the main story only took about 14 hours to complete and I think now I agree. If the game was longer, they could have added so much more to the story alone!

In the first mission, players were able to switch between Peter and Miles, giving a glimpse at each character's skill set and individual power. Initially, I thought I was going to be able to toggle between Miles and Peter during team-up missions, but there were so few team-up missions. The game had been advertised as "Spider-Man 2: Greater Together" but players get so few times with Miles and Peter together. With the introduction of Harry Osborne, Peter begins to distance himself from Miles, and that happens within the first quarter of the game!

Speaking of Harry Osborne, I was excited to see what Insomniac games was going to do with that character, but I feel they missed the mark. They dove very little into flushing out this character (like so many other characters) and seemed to be relying on fans prior knowledge of these characters to fuel their characterization.

The fun part about comic media is the different ways to interpret these characters. For example, Harry and Peter are friends. Why? Because that's just how it's supposed to be. There was very little attention paid to why these characters did the things

they did. Why does Harry hate Peter so much enough to bond with the symbiote? Even to characterize the symbiote more, is Harry a puppet for the symbiote to control or does the symbiote have a will of its own? Who is the true villain? Harry or the Symbiote? To me, the purpose of Harry seemed to be to fuel the characterization of Norman Osborne, Harry's father into his growing hate for Spider-Man and Peter Parker- which is another flaw in storytelling.

Don't get me wrong, there were some great ideas, but they seem to have been only good ideas on paper. They seemed like they wanted to be big for the sake of being big without putting any emotion behind it. For me, the best Spider-Man stories aren't the physical stakes, but the emotional stakes.

Although I dive nowhere as deep into Spider-Man comics as my boyfriend does, I thought they would pull more from different comics. They seemed to rely on *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Spider-Man: the Animated Series* exclusively which made the story feel a little dry. There are so many stories, it's overwhelming, but it felt like research into this character wasn't as

focused as it could have been. One of the books, for example, that I thought they were going to pull from was *Kraven's Last Hunt* since they had both Venom and Kraven, but no.

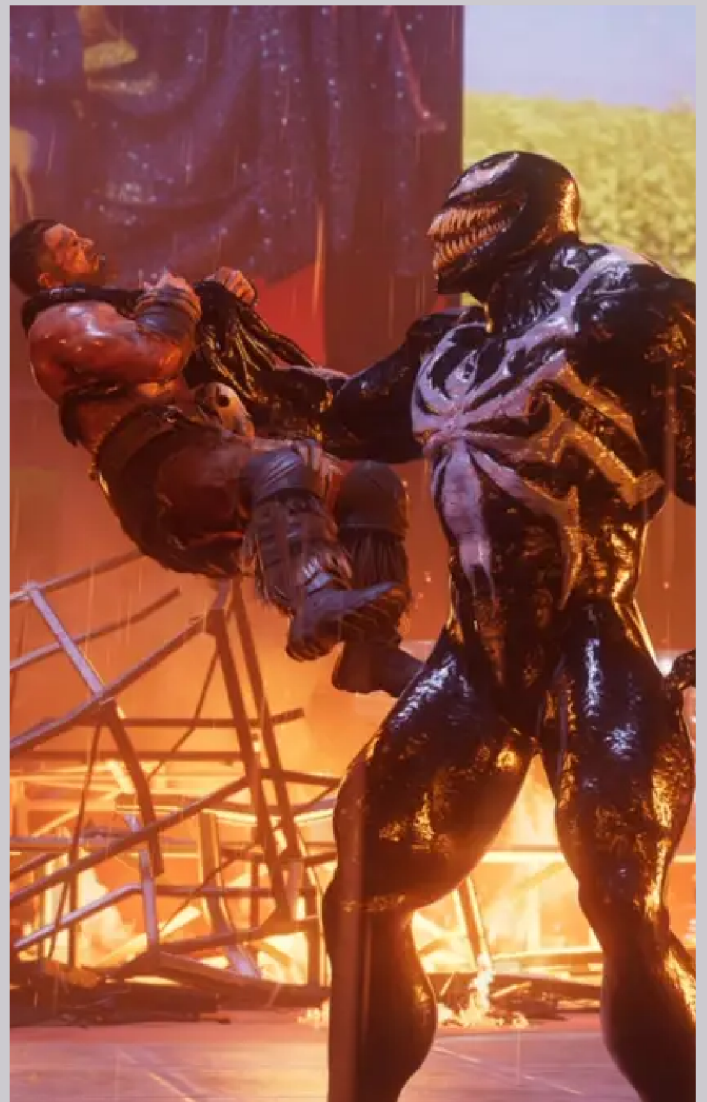
But then what?

But with all of that aside, another problem I had with the game came after the story. Once you complete the main story, there is *literally* nothing to do. One of the things the first game offered was Street crime (one of the things that made the game feel alive in the first one). There was so much variety, muggings, bank robberies, car chases, etc. In the second game, Street crimes were replaced by repetitive takedown missions that took about 10 seconds to complete. The map is massive and there's so much life added to the city (because of the capabilities of the PS5), but there was so little done with it!

Final thoughts?

Despite the countless flaws, I did still enjoy the game the second time around. I think its a great way to push the PlayStation 5's capabilities, but it got a little messy when it came to

figuring out *what* to do with all that power. I think the overall game was a beautiful mess with tons of ideas with not a lot of thought. There seemed to be very little thought behind the story, and more attention on the game mechanics and aesthetics. Although the world *looked* alive, it didn't *feel* alive. Overall, I think that's where the game loses points for me.



LIVE SCREENINGS: A DYING ART SAVED BY RUTGERS' FILM FESTIVAL

BY YAZMIN OMANA

For movie buffs and bored students alike, one of Rutgers' best kept secrets – the New Jersey Film Festival – remains a summertime campus staple. The NJFF presents the opportunity to experience live screenings in a post-streaming world, as well as the chance to see and support up and coming independent filmmakers from different parts of the world/from Minnesota to Brazil. The end of each screening features exclusive Q+As with directors, actors and editors alike who were a part of each film, giving you the special privilege of uncovering the what and whys to each of these films. Attendees to the seasonal festival can expect a wide array of films ranging from nature documentaries to wildly experimental shorts. This year, the 29th Annual Festival competition will be taking place on May 31st, June 1st, June 2nd, June 7th, June 8th, June 9th, and June 15th at Voorhees Hall #105 beginning at 5pm or 7pm each date. For those of you who cannot make it to Rutgers in the summer, the NJIFF provides the special advantage of also being hybrid. Presenting the films both in-person and online for 24 hours. Plus, this year's festival will feature a unique inclusion to the final festival date, featuring acclaimed singer-songwriter, Marissa Nadler, who will be in concert on Saturday, June 15 at 7PM! As a consistent attendee since 2022 till now, I can faithfully say the experience is unlike any other Rutgers can provide!



"ALTONA," THE AFFOLTER BROTHERS



"FILM IS DEAD. LONG LIVE FILM!,"
PETER FLYNN



"I WANT TO LIVE ON MARS," MARIYA SOMOVA

For more information, be sure to check out the New Jersey Film Festival website.

Prices: General Admission Ticket=\$15 Per Program; Festival All Access Pass=\$120; In-Person Only Student Ticket=\$10 Per Program. General Admission Marissa Nadler Concert Ticket=\$25.

The Rutgers Film Co-op/New Jersey Media Arts Center, and the Rutgers University Program in Cinema Studies present the

2024 NEW JERSEY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

WHEN May 31st thru June 9th
Fridays, Saturdays,
and Sundays.
In person screenings
begin at 5pm or 7pm
depending on show date.

WHERE Voorhees Hall #105
Rutgers University,
71 Hamilton Street,
New Brunswick, NJ
Milledoler Hall #100*
*June 1st screening only

TICKETS General Admission: \$15
All Access Pass: \$120
Concert Ticket: \$25
Student Ticket: \$10**
**in person only

MORE INFO



Cover Art: Pizzica ©2024 Albert Gabriel Nigrin featuring Evelyn Reese.

The 29th Annual New Jersey International Film Festival will be taking place on the Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays between May 31-June 9, 2024.

The Festival will be a hybrid one as we will be presenting it online as well as doing in-person screenings at Rutgers University. All the films will be available virtually via Video on Demand for 24 hours on their show date. VOD start times are at 12 Midnight Eastern USA. Each General Admission Ticket or Festival Pass purchased is good for both the virtual and the in-person screenings.

The in-person screenings will be held in Voorhees Hall* #105/Rutgers University, 71 Hamilton Street, New Brunswick, NJ beginning at 5PM or 7PM on their show date.

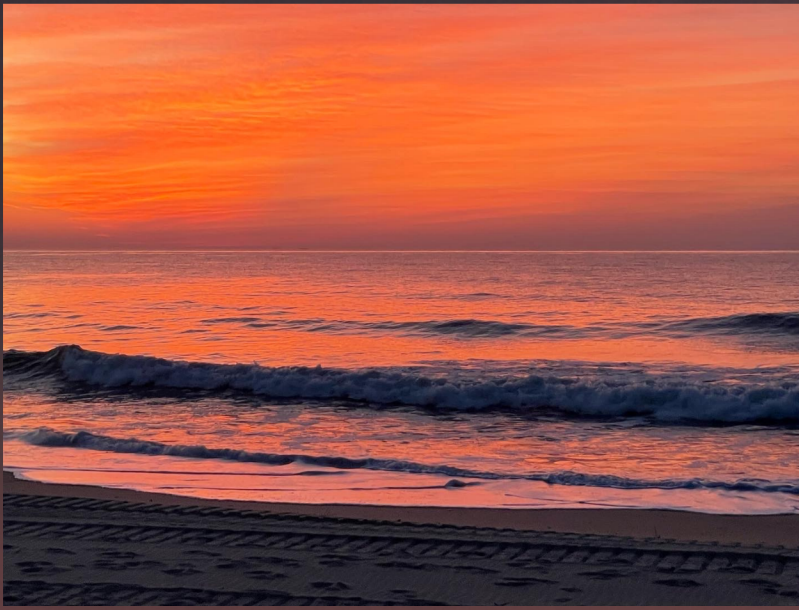
Plus, we are very proud to announce that acclaimed singer-songwriter **Marissa Nadler** will be in concert on **Saturday, June 15 at 7PM.**

General Admission Ticket=\$15 Per Program; Festival All Access Pass=\$120; In-Person Only Student Ticket=\$10 Per Program. General Admission Marissa Nadler Concert Ticket=\$25. For more info scan the QR code on the left or go here:

<https://2024newjerseyinternationalfilmfestival.eventive.org/welcome>

*Note: The Screenings on June 1st will be in Milledoler Hall #100/ Rutgers University, 520 George Street, New Brunswick, NJ.





Photos by Akansha Singh



Photos by
Akansha Singh



Underrated Sitcoms

BY SAADHIKA MAMIDI

If TV watching were an Olympic sport, I'd be on the podium with a gold medal around my neck. Any leisure time? Oh, it's basically a one-way ticket to the world's most comfiest couch and my computer. You name a show, chances are I've binged it faster than you can say 'popcorn.' I even keep a running list in my notes app, like some kind of TV connoisseur. I've seen it all, and let me tell you, there are some hidden gems out there that deserve way more love.

I'm about to spill the Costco-sized tea on "Superstore." Picture this: the funniest, juiciest gossip aisle you've ever seen, except it's in Costco. Yup, that's basically what the show is.

Now, in my not-so-humble opinion, this series is the whole package. We're talking drama, comedy, satire, romance, cringe-worthy moments that make you squirm in your seat, and humor so on point it's like it was custom-made for us. It's like a giant Costco knockoff where a bunch of employees go about their daily grind, and we get to be the nosy customers peeking into their lives.

And let me tell you, I'm all about that slow burn, but this show takes it to a whole new level. It's like watching a sloth on a leisurely stroll. But hey, it's worth the wait... usually.



SUPERSTORE



DOLLFACE

So, full disclosure, I had to dive into some shady internet browsers to catch this show, but let me say, it was worth every pixelated frame. We're talking about a gal who got dumped and now has to do some major friend-fishing because she's been MIA while wrapped up in relationship land (We all know someone like that, right? cough guilty as charged cough).

Now, let's talk about production value. Whoever directed this masterpiece deserves a medal. They've got imagination flying off the screen like confetti at a birthday party, scenes so picturesque they make you want to move in, and oh boy, let's not forget the eye candy. We're talking cute guys galore. But there's more. The plot? Intriguing. I will say that it did get canceled, but it really is still worth the watch.



SCHITT'S CREEK

Confession time: when I first dipped my toes into this show, I really wasn't interested. But I really was wrong. Once I got cozy with the characters, I couldn't get enough. It's like finding that one weird snack at the back of your pantry and realizing it's actually delicious.

Now, picture this: a family hits rock bottom and ends up in a crummy motel for what feels like an eternity. Sounds like a recipe for disaster, right? It is! It's their journey through the trenches of motel life, rubbing elbows with the motley crew of quirky characters already there.

Let's talk dialogue. It's like a verbal orgasm between the characters, and I'm here for every witty comeback and awkward pause. I really haven't heard this good banter since my last situationship.

Oh boy, scratch what I said about slow burns earlier. Abbott Elementary (in my opinion) takes the cake for the slowest burn in the history of burns. I mean, seriously, it's like watching a snail race in slow motion. And don't even get me started on the whole will-they-won't-they situation (spoiler alert: they still haven't figured it out).

But let's not dwell on the snail-paced romance drama. Let's talk about the real MVP here: the conversations. It's like a ping-pong match of witty repartee between the characters that has me giggling in my sheets.

And can we just take a moment to appreciate how this show throws the typical plotline out the window? It's like a breath of fresh air in a world of stale sitcoms. They've created this wacky environment where anything goes, and it's a wild ride for both the characters and us viewers.



ABBOTT ELEMENTARY

The beginning, middle, and end: all too good. But these two shows? They're like the peanut butter and jelly of television – separately they're good, but together, they're a match made in comedy heaven.



COMMUNITY

First up, we've got Community. Picture this: a ragtag group of folks ranging from fresh-faced 20-somethings to seasoned veterans in their 70s, all crammed into a community college study group. Let me tell you, this isn't your average college experience. We're talking more drama than a soap opera, more shadiness than a back-alley card game, and an annual paintball war that'll have you on the edge of your seat.

Okay now, we've got Arrested Development. It's like taking a peek inside the world's wackiest family reunion. Dad's in jail for some white-collar crime, leaving the rest of the family to fend for themselves. And trust me, they're as dysfunctional as a broken toaster. Every episode is a rollercoaster of plot twists, with characters so absurd they make your weirdest relative seem normal.

Both these shows deserve all the recognition in the world, and then some.



ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT



X-MEN IS BACK

by Sage Short

*The long-awaited return of
Marvel's disregarded comic heroes*

In the 1990s, due to a “speculation bubble, an oversaturation of titles, and financial troubles,” Marvel Entertainment went bankrupt. This resulted in the company selling the movie rights to some of their characters. Famously, Spider-man went to Sony, but other characters like The Hulk and Namor (who went to Universal), and Daredevil, the Fantastic Four, and X-Men (who went to Fox) no longer remained in-house. Marvel continued as an independent studio focusing on characters that still remained in-house, like Iron Man and Captain

America. But in 2009, Disney bought Marvel Entertainment for \$4 billion. Disney would then play an integral role in re-negotiating with Sony for sharing rights to Spider-man in February 2015 and integrating the character into the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU).

Later, when Disney bought Fox Entertainment in 2019, plans to bring Daredevil, the Fantastic Four, and X-Men into the MCU became reality. In November of 2021, with the announcement of their new animation studio, Marvel revealed at San Diego Comic-Con to

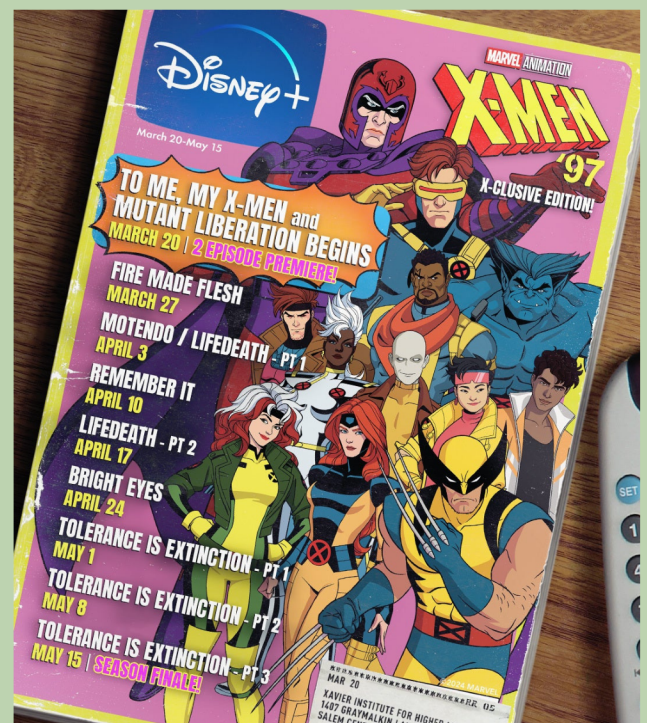


revive and continue *X-Men: The Animated Series* under the new name *X-Men '97*.

X-Men '97 aired March 20th, 2024 and was a refreshing representation of what X-Men should be. X-Men was created in 1961 by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (but would later reach the limelight because of Chris Claremont in 1975) during the height of the Civil Rights movement. Although not intended to be a direct allegory to the movement itself, it undeniably mirrors the systematic oppression, discrimination, and persecution of a minority group



that still translates to this day. Based on our political climate, both inside and outside of the United States, *X-Men '97* shows an all-too-true reality.



Although I wasn't being sniped by Mutant-hunting Sentinels instated by the government to track down and destroy me, as a queer, female-identifying, person-of-color in the 21st century, I turned to the X-Men growing up because I saw myself in them. They were different, like I was, from people around them and faced prejudice because they didn't fit into what society defined as "normal." Despite persecution, the X-Men were proud and hopeful for a future in a world where they could find peace. Even aside from politics, in a time of loneliness and separation in a post-Covid world,

young people can turn to the X-Men for comfort.

X-Men '97 was different from what we have seen in recent superhero media. It was far from a popcorn flick with nothing to say. Instead of relying on nostalgia that comes with the "re-release and continuation" of a show from the 90s, it pushes the boundaries of the genre and source material through its adult storytelling and nuanced approach to these classic heroes. Finally, after years of going unacknowledged, X-Men is finally getting the respect it always desired.





music

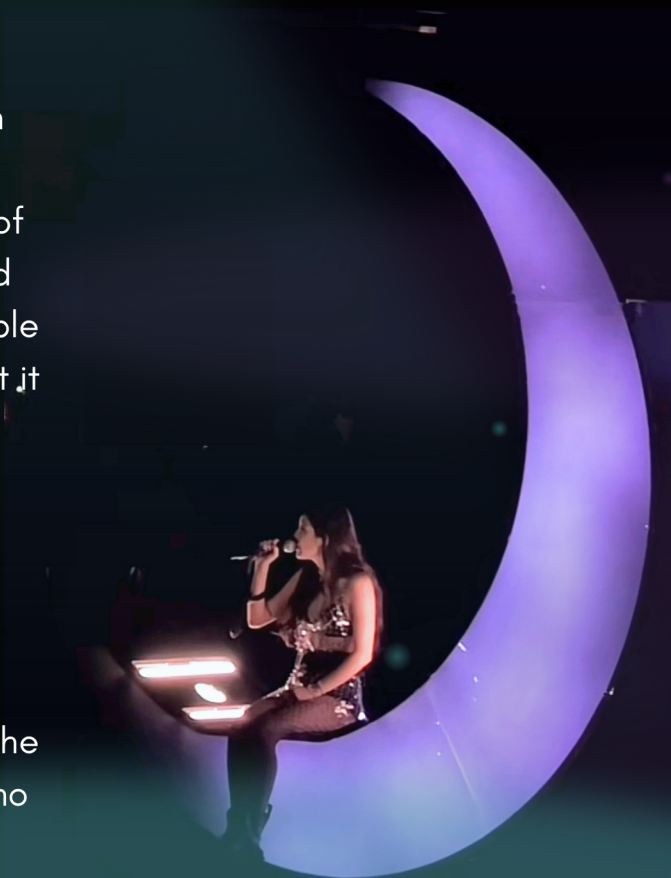
Photo by Sahana Iyer

girlhood at concerts ♡

By Sophie D'Errico

Girlhood. It's both your relationship with yourself as a girl and your relationship with other girls. It's a celebration of each of our moments, big and small. What's incredible about girlhood is that it is simultaneously a highly individualized and yet universally uniting experience.

Girlhood particularly comes to fruition at the concerts of artists who prioritize girlhood in their music and warmly perpetuate the feeling. These artists of note are Olivia Rodrigo, Taylor Swift, and Sabrina Carpenter.



Each of these women have unique stories of girlhood, and they eloquently and passionately communicate it in their music in a raw and vulnerable way.

These artists are so deeply intertwined with their art, and this relationship is particularly powerful at their concerts as they perform their art live. As a result, the expansive rooms are filled with the emotional energy they create in their art, and there is a feeling unknown to any other situation-- that you can take over the world. After you go to a concert, you're passionate and you feel every emotion.

This is why the emphasis on girlhood is so powerful at these concerts. Music helps us process experiences and emotions. That's why we feel so connected to the artists- they make us feel like we're not alone. It's especially meaningful when these artists write about instances when they did things they shouldn't have or when they were in the wrong. They are not trying to say they are perfect. They are learning just as we are- and that is not only okay, but it's beautiful that we're all learning together.

And isn't it so special to think that we all hand-picked out our outfits, and did our hair, and got in a car or hopped on a train and went to the same location to sing our hearts out? To spend the night together? We're all just girls.

We laugh and we cry and we scream. Women supporting women. We make and trade friendship bracelets, build traditions, and complement each other's outfits. There's something so special about everyone coming together to sing their favorite songs, for belting music in a hairbrush is the essence of girlhood, and it's really powerful to think that thousands of people are doing it all at once.

There's a true collective feeling at concerts, particularly with these powerful women on stage. These women are also known for emotional songs that get to the core of what being a young woman is all about. It's wonderful that young music listeners have these women as role models to relate to- the good and the bad about being a girl. It's something we all have in common.



Love, heartbreak, complicated exes, not feeling like enough, feeling confident and beautiful. They tell stories we relate to.

At concerts we're able to laugh with them and it feels as though we're hanging out with our friends, just smiling and goofing around. Sabrina comes up with her silly "nonsense" outros and Olivia has us scream our guts out during "all american b*tch". No one is taking anything too seriously.

So, to conclude, what IS girlhood? Girlhood is screaming your favorite song into a hairbrush. Girlhood is telling your friend when she has something in her teeth. Girlhood is french braiding each other's hair. Girlhood is getting ready for a night out and lending your friend a top. Girlhood is dancing in the mirror. Girlhood is picking flowers. Girlhood is late-night giggles. Girlhood is finding joy in small moments.

Girlhood is going to concerts!



Why They All Look Pretty But Disturbing?

The Controversy of Soft Pornography and Sad Truth of Misogyny in the K-pop Music Industry

By Yvonne Yuqing Liu



These days my social media feed has been bombarded by the new K-pop girl group Illit's new single "Magnetic." The first thought in my mind when I saw them was "I thought teenage sexual content was illegal, why are these lolita fantasies are still here?"

I felt weird watching those pretty and skinny teenage girl idols performing innocent, but oddly seducing choreography, in their puffed-sleeve dresses with laces and bows and white stockings, with scenes set with disturbing sexual innuendo, and from an obvious male-gaze perspective. However, their music video still reached 24 million views in two weeks. Their teenage fans crazily follow them and try to disguise the fact that their production is pedophilic.

Illit was not the first girl group that fell into a dispute. This has been rooted in the mechanism of the industry. Though disgusting, it is not a big surprise that such a controversial production still exists in K-pop—sexism and misogyny is still

an unsolvable problem in the industry or even in the whole East-Asian social context.

Ever since they started to rise, K-pop music and performances have been criticized for sexualizing and objectifying female idols. As the K-pop industry evolves, idols are more and more likely to debut at a younger age, entering the market that sells romantic fantasies as teenagers. Being underage means they have less to no control over their performance and music production, and therefore completely controlled by their company.

Back to Illit's "Magnetic." This music video is full of obnoxious lolita inclinations in the production. In their music video, many symbols reflect the perverted teenage sex fantasies covered by the so-called concept of "dream-core" of their producer. Members were made to dress up like young children while singing "Women should be attractive." The chorus imitated the sound of infants talking, sex toys scattered on the floor,

girls being trapped at a hotel, rolling from the floor to the bed, and of course, the choreography that makes them look like marionettes, clearly saying that they are soulless dolls being played and manipulated. This is nauseating. Their personalities and voices were eliminated, and enslaved by a concept that is full of male gaze and the objectification of one by another.



@Wonyoung from IVE

Sometimes male idols or mature female idols get to control their music production, from song-writing to concept development. The younger generations of girl group is completely controlled by their company, being marionettes of the male-dominated production team.

Girl idols were made into delicate porcelain dolls that were way too skinny, pleasing, and easy to control, especially when they were underage. The morbid

aesthetics towards women, juvenile sexualization, and brazen misogyny are distorting this sexist industry even more.

Many female idols were trying to break the sexism in this patriarchal industry. (G)I-DLE, under the lead of their member Soyeon, was attempting to bring feminist conversations into its music production. Their groundbreaking singles “Tomboy” and “Nxde” featured the concept of “women are themselves, not men’s sex dolls,” giving them a revival of surviving in the industry. Yet they are still being judged these days for “shouting out too loud” and “being at their wit’s end” because they constantly talk about feminism. Their single “Wife” was banned by KBS, a mainstream South Korean television and streaming channel, for having “sexually provocative lyrics.”



©(G)-Idle “Nxde” Concept Cover



©(G)-Idle “Wife” Music Video

Often times East-Asian society is dominated by patriarchal ideologies, even though women are advocating for their significant existence and voice. The toxic elements of traditional aesthetics towards women shape the production of the industry, and soft pornography long existed in the society’s media context, making it even easier. By targeting horny male audiences and gullible young girls, they just keep feeding them with new fantasies, or fetishes, wrapped by the candy paper of pop music.

Making their popularity by gaining traffic on streaming and social media, K-pop music is growing to be made just for TikTok videos with constant repetitions that only last about 30 seconds, disregarding the quality and originality of their music. They don’t even care if the content is healthy or not. It’s a brainwashing of fast food and guilty pleasure that is meant to be controversial to sneakily steal your views, and go viral by the criticisms after it. They know the market won’t be canceling them so they continue to make more.



©Illit “Magnetic” Music Video

But what about the girls? Well, sadly, they always have more supplies to replace the old ones once they are broken, or not popular anymore.

ROSIE: A JOURNEY OF MUSIC, AUTHENTICITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY

by Kayla Gonzales

Rosaileen Scher, better known as Rosie, is solidifying her mark on the music industry. She uses the stage name ROSIE on all platforms to differentiate herself. Rosie openly discusses her mental health challenges and body image issues with an audience of more than 1 million monthly listeners.

In 2020, Rosie teased witty lyrics through TikTok and quickly garnered attention from all over the Internet. The words, “We were up ‘til 6 in the morning, 5 days a week, you said 4ever then left before I counted to 3. Loved you a little 2 much, but I was never, I was never the 1” soon became the chorus to her hit single, “Never the 1.” It was officially released in 2020 and has since generated over 37 million plays on Spotify



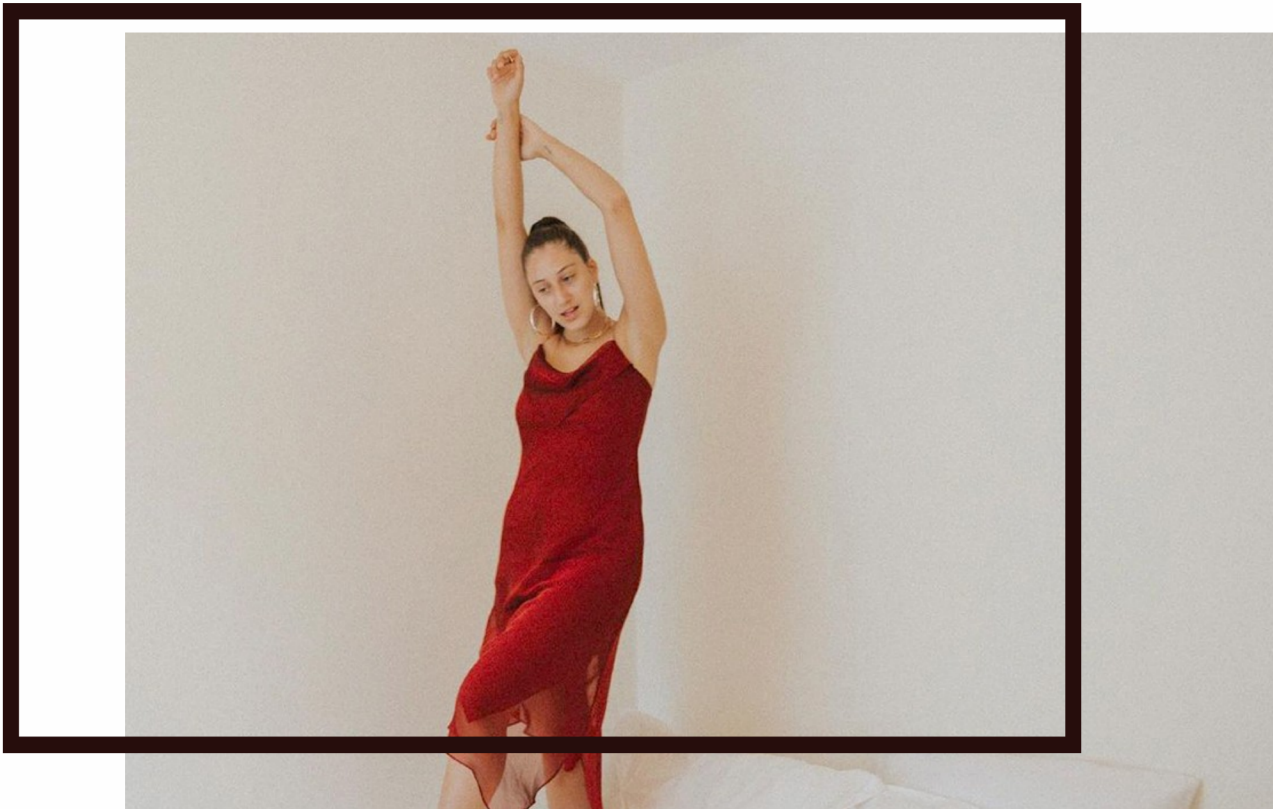


I attended my first Rosie concert in 2023 during “The Healing Tour.” It also coincided with my best friend’s first-ever concert, Rosie’s first headlining tour, and my ever-growing love for intimate shows. Rosie took the time to meet with all the fans in line before the show began and shared how grateful she was to have a platform where people can learn to understand what they are going through with the power of song lyrics. During the show, we were quite literally front and center, and it still stands as one of the most special shows I have ever been to. The crowd sang back each word, sharing the heartfelt message of growth and acceptance that Rosie aims to spread. It was a cathartic process and genuine therapy for fans of the now 24-year-old artist.



Rosie consistently releases new music, and in 2021, she came out with her first EP, 20mg of Happiness. The 7-track EP walks the listener through the various stages of grief consisting of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance. It’s an emotional roller coaster one feels when experiencing heartbreak, complemented by the pain of losing your sense of self.





A handful of days after the show, Rosie dropped her sophomore EP, *5 Songs for Healing*. Through approximately 16 minutes of music, one goes on a journey of reflection, closure, and self-love. The EP characterizes a breakthrough moment in Rosie's career, highlighting how she regained control of the narrative. During this period, the New York City native announced how she co-wrote the song "Love Again" for Celine Dion, a song so powerful that it convinced Dion to change the film title to match it.

Rosie established her entire brand on bettering mental health and being a "no makeup and no filter" artist. She partnered with The Mayfair Group, a clothing company changing the narrative surrounding unrealistic societal standards, in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month. She constantly shares resources on her social media pages, noting that she wants her fans to feel equally supported by her as she feels by them. During multiple New York Fashion Weeks, Rosie represented the brand, Alice + Olivia, completely makeup-free. She has even walked several red-carpet events in the same way. Her constant commitment to being as authentic as possible is refreshing and inspiring for fans.

Rosie handed out free merch and signed postcards, amplifying her commitment to give back. After the set, I met up with Rosie to briefly share my excitement for her upcoming music and her future tour. She is the most kind-hearted artist I had the opportunity to meet with and she genuinely loves the people who support her.

Rosie's most recent song is a collab with singer Caleb Hearn for "Little Bit Better." After being featured on a billboard in Times Square, the pair quickly reached over 2 million Spotify streams since the song's release on February 23, 2024.

If you are searching for a new artist with lyrics that Niall Horan described as "Julia Michaels-esque" and "word-vomit," I highly recommend checking out Rosie and learning more about her experiences with mental health, her mission to remain true to herself, and the memorable lyrics that seem to capture everything I struggle to put into words.

In February 2024, Rosie held a small release show in Brooklyn to celebrate the release of the single, "Lose Me Too," and tease unreleased songs. She constantly thanked her brother, Matteo Scher, for being an amazing manager. They have also collaborated on several of her songs together. In between songs, she dedicated specific lyrics to fans she recognized in the crowd, particularly one who brought her roses even though the fan was having a hard day herself.





Photos by
Sahana Iyer





moonstruck

Photo by Amber Safeer

LAUFY'S BEWITCHING *SOPHOMORE ALBUM*

REVIEW BY AMBER SAFEER

Icelandic-Chinese artist Laufey Lin Jónsdóttir (simply known as Laufey) released her sophomore jazz-inspired pop album *Bewitched* in September 2023. Debuting at number twenty-three on the Billboard 200 and number one on both Jazz Albums and Traditional Jazz Albums charts, Laufey's *Bewitched* tells a tale of love and heartbreak whilst paying homage to Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and her roots in the orchestra. As she blends the worlds of jazz, classical, and pop into nostalgic yet modern-leaning ballads, Laufey pours out her heart to her fans in the hope of connecting to the all-too-common emotions of love and grief.

DREAMER

Laufey introduces her album with hauntingly beautiful layered vocals, mimicking the one-take all-band recordings of the 1920s and 1930s. As the song moves into the subsequent verses, the sound is reminiscent of the jazz stylings and themes featured in the 2016 hit *La La Land*. Despite recognizing the beauty in focusing on yourself, your hopes, and your dreams, "Dreamer" also demonstrates the frustrations commonly associated with falling in love. "Dreamer" is about understanding your worth, and setting boundaries for those who drag you down; however, it also acts as a prelude for the heartbreak that comes with the album.

"NO BOY'S GONNA KILL THE
DREAMER IN ME."

SECOND BEST

As (ironically) the second song of the album, Laufey dives straight into the melancholy by painting a scene of embarrassment and regret associated with putting your all into someone—only to receive nothing in return. It is a back-and-forth struggle, wondering why you weren't enough, coupled with convincing yourself that you deserve better. With themes analogous to songs such as "The Grudge" by Olivia Rodrigo or "Tolerate It" by Taylor Swift, Laufey focuses on the denial one feels as opposed to the anger that follows.

HAUNTED

Filled with sorrowful melodies of the violin, "Haunted" radiates a somber theatrical vibe that serves as a continuation of the previous song. Despite admitting that her lover does not reciprocate her feelings, Laufey cannot help but paint a story of delusion and is nearly possessed to stay. While not my favorite song on the album, I appreciate the chilling setting that this song provides.

"I'LL PRETEND YOU'LL
STAY FOREVER"

MUST BE LOVE

After quite a few depressing songs, "Must Be Love" spotlights a slightly more optimistic tone with a (mainly) gentle guitar backing track. It is slow, delicate, and notably different from the previous songs—clear indications of falling in love. While this dream-like feeling can be confusing and oftentimes nearly irrevocable, Laufey emphasizes the beauty in how having a full heart can completely transform someone.

WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING

One of my personal favorites on the album, "While You Were Sleeping" feels like the personification of a blush on the cheeks—immense overjoy juxtaposed with a twinge of embarrassment. Something about this song could make anyone believe that love is real and could happen at any moment. The use of the softly strummed guitar, angelic echoes, and the precise high-pitched violin makes me melt every time.



LOVESICK

With more of a modern, acoustic twist, I could imagine this liberating ballad having a place in a romantic drama. Despite the series of hopeful songs that precede it, the melancholic lyrics appear to reference the story strung up in "Second Best" or "Haunted". The sudden rise and fall of love is especially prominent in this song as Laufey describes how she grows attached within mere days and is abruptly cut off, left only to dream of the mournful memories.



CALIFORNIA AND ME

Leaning into the classical piano, Laufey expertly portrays the spiraling feelings of jealousy, insanity, and anger that result from a breakup. However, she juxtaposes what should be a big upheaval of emotions with poise and class, demonstrating her reluctant acceptance.

"CAN'T QUIT THIS, SO DAMN WICKED /
TO LEAVE CALIFORNIA AND ME "

NOCTURNE (INTERLUDE)

As the only instrumental song on the album, "Nocturne (interlude)" serves as the transition between the complex and confounding emotions of the previous songs to the more somber, naive tunes yet to come. It also hints at the final number of the album, "Bewitched."

PROMISE

After the interlude, the songs gain a noticeably more depressing tone, starting with "Promise." It represents the battle of trying to restrain oneself from harm, yet inevitably losing control despite knowing the cost. There is a brief reference to cigarettes in this song, which I think deliberately demonstrates how love is one of the worst addictions a person can face, and how debilitating the withdrawal symptoms are.

"NO MATTER HOW LONG I RESIST
TEMPTATION / I WILL ALWAYS LOSE"



FROM THE START

Even if you have never heard of Laufey, there is a good chance you would recognize "From the Start", as it found fame through TikTok. While I found it an odd choice to transition from a very somber number to something that rings more upbeat, the lyrics of "From the Start" aren't all sunshine and rainbows. In spite of its playful, almost childish, and naive attitude, the story still alludes to the heartbreak and embarrassment present in the previous songs.

"I CAN'T QUITE BELIEVE / YOU
THINK I'M BEAUTIFUL"

MISTY

Sung by notable figures like Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, and Leslie Gore, Laufey's cover of "Misty" serves as a nod to her jazz upbringing while fitting the theme of her album.

SERENDIPITY

As we get further into the second half of the album, Laufey keeps acknowledging and alluding to her naivety as she continues falling in love. This is supported by lyrics calling attention to recognizable superstitions, such as four-leaf clovers or lucky coins. Moreover, the song steadily crescendos as she falls more and more deeply in love, convincing herself that this love will be the one that lasts.

LETTER TO MY 13 YEAR OLD SELF

In terms of content, "Letter to My 13 Year Old Self" stands out against the rest of the album. Instead of directly being about Laufey's heartbreak, it is a very personal message to Laufey's younger self (as the name implies). It serves as a moment to reflect on her life, choices, and feelings in order to find peace and love within herself. As a sucker for songs like this, it is one of my favorites emotionally.

"YOU'LL GROW UP AND / GROW
SO CONFIDENT AND / WRITE
YOUR STORY"



BEWITCHED

With a feature from the Philharmonia Orchestra, the finale song "Bewitched" feels magical and straight out of a Disney movie. It is similar to "While You Were Sleeping" in the way that it portrays love. Unlike the rest of the album, which assumes a melancholy, frustrated tone, "Bewitched" illustrates love in a positive light, ending the album on a satisfyingly high note.

"YOU BEWITCH ME / EVERY DAMN
SECOND / YOU'RE WITH ME"

Overall, I adore this album for its lyricism, its ability to take different genres of music and harmoniously meld them together, and how it uniquely demonstrates love from all angles. I do feel that the structure of the album is a bit odd, as I think that the story Laufey is trying to tell is hard to follow. Despite this, I also understand that love and grief do not follow a strict path – it is a fierce rollercoaster of emotions that overlap with one another. As such, Laufey's *Bewitched* is absolutely worth a listen – whether you are falling into love, falling out of love, or just looking for a calming, melodious album to listen to in your spare time.





a Love Letter to Spring Films

By Sophie D'Errico

Spring is the season of the romance genre. It's the perfect time to cuddle up after a long day of sunshine, tulips and dandelions and curl up to a film as lovingly warm and fuzzy as the weather. Below are four films that encapsulate the essence of springtime and romance.

Pride and Prejudice (2005):

This film directed by Joe Wright is a true treat for the soul. *Pride and Prejudice* is a stunningly beautiful film set against the backdrop of lush fields and ornate ballrooms. The swoon-worthy romance between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy will warm your heart and have you giggling and kicking your feet. Emotional scenes are filmed amidst intense rainfall, showing all of the sides of spring and making you want to run outside and splash in puddles. Stunning shots of the sun peeking behind tree lines as the golden glare shines over expansive fields will make you wish you could crawl through the screen and curl your toes in the grass. The beautifully soothing musical score adds an additional calming element.



The Sound of Music (1965)

The Sound of Music is an absolute gift of a film directed by Robert Wise. Who doesn't feel moved by the sequence of the breathtaking views of the Austrian Alps and flower fields as Julie Andrews reaches her arms out and beautifully sings about how "the hills are alive"? This film hugs its audience and showers them with roses and daisies. It makes them feel warm and filled with love as the heartwarming connections bloom between Maria and the von Trapp family. The songs throughout the film are both adorable and emotional. The striking setting will also make you feel as though you need to book a flight to Salzburg immediately. Maria's free-spirited energy encapsulates the springtime feeling perfectly as she feels like the personification of running outside on a warm day after a long winter.



A Room with a View (1985)

This film, directed by James Ivory, is perfect for a lazy spring Sunday since it is a slow story that truly allows you to absorb and rest in its visuals. Set in both the Italian and English countryside as well as the city of Florence, this film has a range of gorgeous visuals. This is the kind of film that turns your pupils into heart-shapes because of how deeply entranced one becomes by the beauty of this film. This film embodies spring through the main character, Lucy, who begins the film reserved, but learns passion and freedom in her romance with the contrastingly playful George. Breathtaking sunlit, waist-high poppy fields and splash-filled swims in green ponds make this film a joy to watch.



*Il Signor Avvocato Emilio Della Porta
Tribunale di Faenza*

Call Me By Your Name (2017)

Directed by Luca Guadagnino, this film takes place against a dreamy Italian countryside backdrop. The visuals and stylistic choices of this film are incredible and every shot is so beautiful and meaningful. Although this film takes place over the summer, the lifestyle of going from swimming hole to swimming hole, biking around town, reading books, sitting in white wrought iron chairs, and eating fresh apricots makes it the perfect film to watch during the transition from spring to summer in desire of warm days. The romance between Elio and Oliver is powerfully enigmatic, yet clearly passionate and endearing. The lush grass, waterfalls, and picnic blankets inspire travel and wanderlust in each viewer.



Whether you're currently in spring or simply want to experience the spirit of the season to get over the winter blues, these films are perfect for immersing yourself in the springtime feeling!



WEDNESDAYS ARE FOR TEA PARTIES

BY SAHANA IYER

The gentle caressing of the cool night air induces a slight shiver to pass down your body. It's exactly 8:30 pm on a Wednesday and you stand in front of the Busch Student Center waiting for the arrival of the *H* bus– the one that will make you *Homeward* bound. When it finally makes an appearance, you do not have time to think. You get jostled by the impatient crowd, but you maintain your resolve. You need to get on that bus. And so, the race begins. Students pile up outside the sliding doors, leaving an inadequate pocket of space for those exiting the bus. The driver attempts to manage the chaos, to no avail. You stay off to the side, but close enough to the entrance– respectful, but eager. By the time you make it on, all the seats are occupied. You don't care. Your shoulders slump with relief or exhaustion– you can't tell. You exhale a puff of air and turn the volume up on your phone; the angelic voice of Ella Fitzgerald fills your ear (courtesy of noise-canceling AirPods). The “Lullaby of Leaves” provides a calming backdrop as you take a scan around the bus. It is a strange (yet a wondrous) phenomenon, you think, that you and 40 other strangers are co-existing in a small, shared space for a brief moment in time. Your journeys have coincided despite your different destinations.

Once The Yard emerges in your peripheral vision, your giddiness increases manifold. The bus stops, and the rush of adrenaline propels you forward. You hop off the bus and practically run to your University Center (at Easton Ave) on-campus apartment. The moon lights your path and the Catholic Center (cathedral) next to Barnes and Noble, giving it the gothic touch– you stop to take a picture. The scene needed to be preserved.

When you enter your apartment, you hear soft laughter and the boiling of water. Your entrance initiates the greetings and inquisition from your friends. You can't help but spill every minute and mundane detail of your day to them. You all laugh at the (mis)adventures of your day. You receive comfort for your stressors. The oven chimes, signaling that the chocolate chip cookies are ready– just in time. The tea bag is soaked in hot water. The vintage European style tea set is retrieved from the cabinet. You and your friends huddle around the dining table, clink your teacups together, and give cheers for Wednesdays. For the power of friendship. For home.



MOONSTRUCK

CHER • NICOLAS CAGE

AN E-BOARD REVIEW



Cher is the QUEEN. I will always stand by that statement. Her magnificent 80s fluffy blowout and her pouty red lips captured my attention from the minute her character, Loretta Castorini, “glows up”. I love that this 1987 classic incorporated all the conventional stereotypes– Italian family dynamics, beauty and beast romance, and fate (measured by the appearance of a full moon)– and still managed to be somewhat plausible. Did I get a major ick from Nicolas Cage’s character? Yes. I can understand the broken-hand monologues and the rift between brothers. However, I draw the line at sexual assault and the idea of falling in love in less than 24 hours. But I suppose the creators intended the movie to be satirical, a commentary on the “love at first sight” trope, and outlandish (as indicated by the name). You are supposed to suspend your disbelief and embrace the rose-colored glasses– embrace the fact that Loretta Castorini is destined to be a cougar. I highly recommend it to all the hopeless romantics out there. And to anyone who wants a good laugh.


SAHANA IYER,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

9/10

First of all, I want to personally shadow-kick my mom and aunts for gushing over Nicolas Cage’s nonexistent sex appeal. He looks like ChatGPT’s ideation of possibly any Tim Burton character. It seemed Cage was caricaturing the classic bad-boy archetype. Yet, instead of sympathizing with the misunderstood hero, I wanted to pluck the fingers off of his remaining hand. Cher was classy as ever, as the closeted cougar and the anarchic adulterer, while she effortlessly wore her sultry red lips. However, considering the absence of consent, reinventing her wardrobe after a sloppy makeout session was tacky and concerning. I refuse to acknowledge Moonstruck’s synopsis. It is not needed. The film is an emotion rather than a rigid (and weak) plot. An inherent “everything goes” aura justifies the tangled love affairs because love is all that matters. Be it in the way the moon defies the moon cycle every time somebody is horny or the buoyancy in Cher’s gait after meeting Cage. Romanticism is the only science present in the world of Moonstruck. Anyway, I dedicate my review to the absolutely fire morning toasts that Cher and her mother shared.

ANANYA MEHTA,
SECTION EDITOR

6.8/10



The movie gave me a strong Woody Allen vibe, probably because it takes place in New York City – a place where all romantic, absurd and unpredictable love stories take place. I originally faced a 5/10 for such an engagement of a saucy widow in love with her fiancé's brother because it was outrageous and cheesy. But I thought over and over again about the many love stories happening throughout, and they all inevitably don't fall into the cliché category. Maybe it's because the movie had a never-ending discussion about love, family, and relationships, and there's always a moonstruck at some point, but the rest of their lives is still mostly a crapshoot, and Loretta's mother, who is clearly the loser in love, is wise and open-minded enough to see through it, including her husband's cheating. "You're going to die anyway," reminds us of "Nobody's Perfect." We're probably all going to die. That's why Cher walks out of the beauty store looking like Louis XIV without a mustache; Nicolas Cage is so ruthless that he breaks his hand on a horn; Dean Martin's "That's Love" has a languid, magnetic, double-tracked voice that is so tantalizing... So, let's do something crazy together on a sexy full moon.

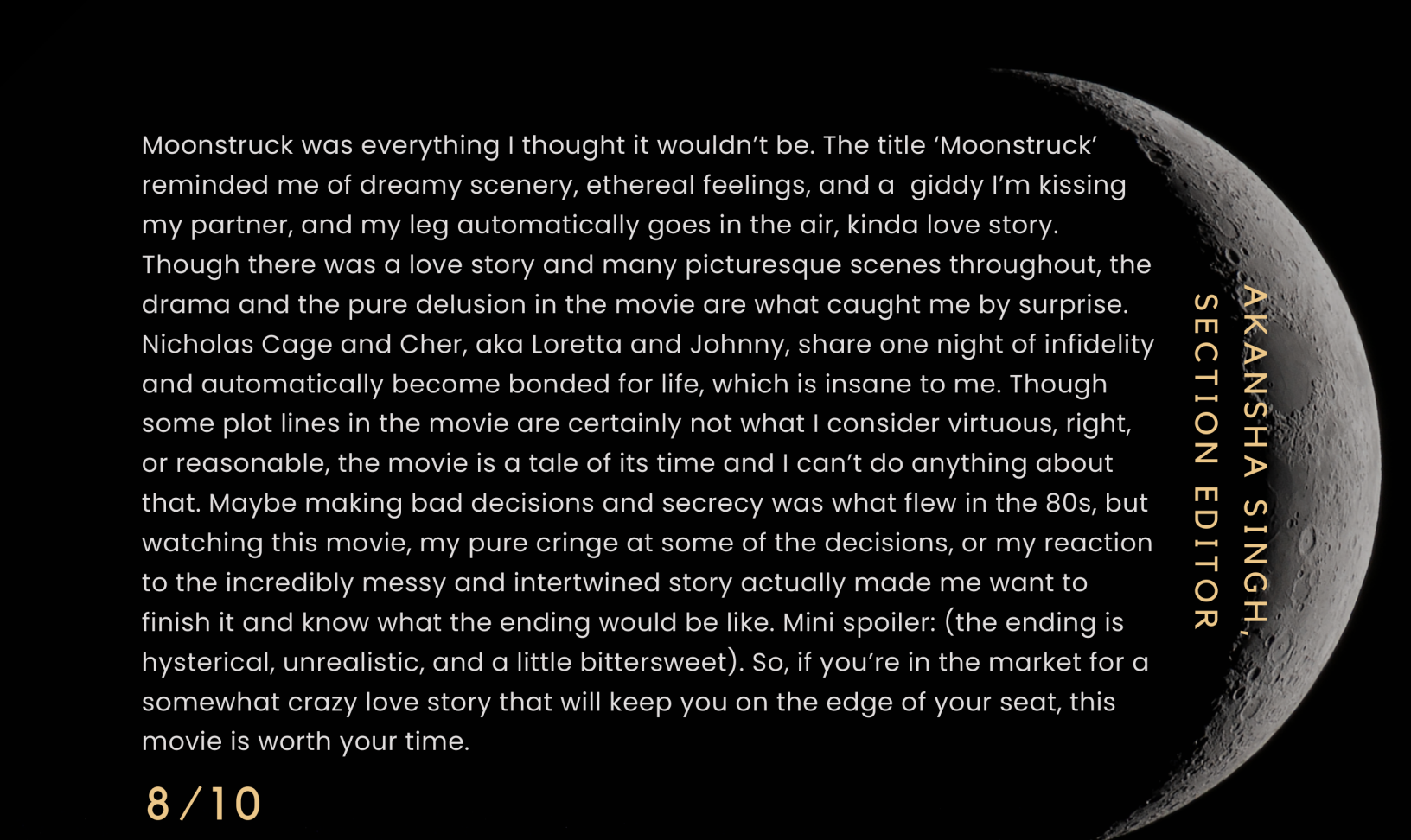
YVONNE YUQING LIU,
MARKETING DIRECTOR

7.5/10

When I sat down to watch this film, I was none-the-wiser to the absolute trainwreck of a plot line that was about to ensue. All I knew was that Cher, an icon, was starring alongside Nicholas Cage, the National Treasure guy. Imagine my shock when Cher started laying on the thickest Brooklyn/Italian accent known to man complete with the emphatic hand gestures and fierce attitude. Truly, this movie is a product of its time – the wildly high 80s hair, the nonsensical dialogue, and of course, the utter ignorance to sexual assault and normalization of cheating on ones partner. Nevertheless, with a modern perspective on the film and the knowledge of today's society, I cannot deny how comical these scenes were. From watching Cher's character Loretta outright explain to her partner how to propose (as he's proposing) to the Deus Ex Machina conclusion to resolve the messiness of it all, I have to admit that I enjoyed the film because of its absurdity. If you are looking for a romcom to watch with your friends on a rainy Saturday night, then Moonstruck is surely the way to go.

AMBER SAFEER,
CREATIVE DIRECTOR


8/10



Moonstruck was everything I thought it wouldn't be. The title 'Moonstruck' reminded me of dreamy scenery, ethereal feelings, and a giddy I'm kissing my partner, and my leg automatically goes in the air, kinda love story. Though there was a love story and many picturesque scenes throughout, the drama and the pure delusion in the movie are what caught me by surprise. Nicholas Cage and Cher, aka Loretta and Johnny, share one night of infidelity and automatically become bonded for life, which is insane to me. Though some plot lines in the movie are certainly not what I consider virtuous, right, or reasonable, the movie is a tale of its time and I can't do anything about that. Maybe making bad decisions and secrecy was what flew in the 80s, but watching this movie, my pure cringe at some of the decisions, or my reaction to the incredibly messy and intertwined story actually made me want to finish it and know what the ending would be like. Mini spoiler: (the ending is hysterical, unrealistic, and a little bittersweet). So, if you're in the market for a somewhat crazy love story that will keep you on the edge of your seat, this movie is worth your time.

AKANSHA SINGH,
SECTION EDITOR

8/10



I have 2 major takeaways from Moonstruck: 1) I never knew I'd ever consider Nicholas Cage hot (in the past tense), but ever since our screening of Moonstruck, it feels like I've been convincing all my friends that, yes, he was actually hot. 2) I always knew that Cher was hot. As for her work in the film, she made me want 80s level big hair, a makeover, and a completely unrealistic, borderline offensive New York accent. My knowledge of Cher's acting chops comes from Burlesque and drag queens' impersonations of her, making me super curious as to how she would size up to my assumptions. She obviously played the role excellently, making me think that if I didn't know her to be Cher, I would assume she was a standout actress. Later, I did come to find out that Moonstruck indeed was an Oscar-winning success in 1988, and not just a cute word. Overall, I will say that the performances were great, but the storyline was almost whimsical for how unrealistic it was. It was a great film for those who love nostalgia, bad accents, New York-Italians, and the kind of movies you don't watch for the plot.

YAZMIN OMANA,
PRESIDENT



6.5/10



MANIC PIXIE COW DISEASE

Ananya Mehta

Did you know cockroaches are immune to bug-repellent spray? Insecticide actually rejuvenates the cockroaches' leather backs by serving as an SPF-infused aromatic. This incentivizes the roaches to continue their touristy ventures. Crazy right? Well, that's how I feel about the Busch Campus. No matter how hard I try to avoid that cesspool, it creeps on me! Busch feels like if Biden vs. Trump went on for another four years.



I wish I had something poetic to describe my disdain for the virginal dump, but all I can think of is Trump's metrical use of "shit-hole." The thousand-time impeached president's utilization of the expletive was incredibly racist and inappropriate. However, it may have saved him an impeachment or two if he used it to describe the Busch campus and its dwellers instead of developing countries.

Anyway, don't listen to me. I, the College Ave supremacist, am thinking of packing my bags and moving to the cursed hubble. Deffo p. Hundo p. Forever p. I have to change my habitat to find love in this tepid world that only seems to perceive grifting lupus patients, ex-fat fatphobes, and that one Spelling Bee Queen who cried because I told her to shut the fuck up after continuously asking what "bludgeoned" meant as somebody described how their family friend murdered someone with a stick.

Indeed, the world that reveres those with claws for eyes and a gradience of oxidized sanguine for paint charts is grim. And I have never seen karma enact itself. Even when ethno-conglomerates are privatizing raindrops. Or when a Royal simply gets peepee poopoo cancer instead of addressing their familial sins. I once took karma by the throat and pushed an AP studded girl to fail her pass-or-fail essay in high school for being rude to me in the sixth grade. Yet, she still managed to get a complete scholarship for some fancy college. The only time crisp karma was cultivated was when my dad's wallet got stolen four years after he forced me to pursue an IT degree.

My history teacher used to say that God only resides in prison. This has to be the only time his Reagan-loving ass was right because the Busch campus is the only site in which I have seen lovers. Lovers who cured their early-onset erectile dysfunction by frolicking in parking lots for hours at a time with their enamored amores. In fact, I shared an empty bus with a twosome so engrossed that they depended on each other's whirling and wafting bodies as support during the ride. Perhaps the moonstruck mysticism is the colorful blanket of trees that guides the romantics down the bland paths to their next STEM class.

This attraction is not lust since the sex revolution came to the only timely ceasefire in 2020, overlooking Generation Z. It truly is a trip-in-a-pothole and die-in-a-ditch level of intimacy. Everybody is a cloudy-eyed virgin inhaling pollution and airborne diseases instead of, as corny as it sounds, each other! If it were up to me, I would go Dick Cheney-level biowarfare by discretely injecting Gen Z with harmless stds to steer away their paranoia.



My exigency for romance is simple. To date, I have undergone many relationships- all but romantic. For instance, I have an auntie who used to invite us for weekly dinners for about seven years straight. My sole purpose during those dinner parties was to “accidentally” dispose of a metal spoon. Eventually, the cabinet door to the garbage sported a pristine child lock. This lady was childless and almost divorced. Now, imagine that auntie was a possible love interest for a young me. That anecdote would be an incredible meet-cute (pedophilia aside)!

Unfortunately, my heart and parietal lobe share an inverse connection to romance. I have only been smitten two and a half times in my life. The first two were a set of beautiful gay twins who would pass by my locker before homeroom every day. The latter consisted of a hopeless crush that I came to terms with four years too late. Even creeps avoid me.

And don't forget about biology! Before my eggs eviscerate into old-age asexuality, I must furnish my heart with a satisfactory supply of flings, liaisons, and dejections. It is also imperative that my brain decodes lovey-dovey sensations before my prefrontal cortex solidifies in a measly four years. Or else, I will enter a self-induced anaphylactic shock anytime anybody looks in my direction. God forbid anybody asks me the time!

My criteria for a possible suitor is earthy. All he needs is a thick head of hair and a dead mother to avoid any mama's boys. Considering the casual despair, I am sure the Busch campus is home to many motherless students. Therefore, I urge all of you to use your forgiven student loans to pack your bags and move to the Busch campus with me!



Nostalgia, Memory, and Perspective

By Aghaby Gallab

Silly bands, scented pencils in school book fairs, those twisted erasers that could not erase, and the pointer tools we all wanted as kids but had no use for after we got them are core memories that we all share. These are aspects of the human experience that unite us, including shared perspective, memory, and nostalgia. Each impact has influenced how we perceive the past, present, and what the future holds.

Nostalgia is an emotional yearning or affection for the past that is frequently accompanied by a wish to return in time or place. It's a complicated feeling that can be brought on by a number of things, including familiar locations, sounds, and music. As it enables people to relive treasured memories and events from the past, nostalgia can be both consoling and bittersweet. It can also evoke sentiments of melancholy or yearning for bygone eras. We often catch ourselves in nostalgia at random points. It is always a warm heartache.

Memory is the cognitive process by which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved. It is essential to how our perceptions of the world and our individualities are formed. Many things, such as feelings, experiences, and personal viewpoints, can impact memories. Some memories can be clear and simple to recall, while others might change with time or become distorted or reinterpreted.

"Perspective" describes how a person sees or understands specific facts, experiences, and events. Many things influence it, such as prior experiences, personal beliefs, and cultural background. Individual perspectives might differ significantly from one another, resulting in disparities in how commonplace events or phenomena are interpreted. Our perspective affects how we interpret the passage of time, the importance of past events, and how we recall and feel nostalgic.

The complicated interaction of nostalgia, memory, and perspective shapes how we navigate our current experiences and relate to the past. They provide us with a perspective on the world and how we fit into it, which helps shape our sense of self, community, and emotional ties to the past.

Photo by Diane Kim

THE MYSTERIOUS POPULARITY OF *Mafia Romance*

By Nikhita Kumar



So we've all seen those books, right?

You know the ones. A ubiquitous presence in your local Barnes & Noble, these books known as mafia romances are bedecked with rugged hunks casting smoldering gazes out of the covers upon anyone unfortunate enough to be nearby. These bemusing covers are only worsened by the hilarious titles plastered onto the hunks' bodies (think something like "My Beastly Kingpin." Not an actual title, but close enough). In some way or another, we've all encountered these bizarre romances set in the deadly yet titillating world of organized crime. For how confounded we are by the books themselves, we are triply so by their immense popularity. A simple search on Amazon for "mafia romance" yields over 20,000 results. The Netflix mafia romance film "365 Days," despite its controversies, was a big hit. But what makes mafia romance so gripping?

To answer this question for the times, we have to examine the key elements of a swoon-worthy mafia romance. Firstly, every mafia romance needs the perfect female lead. Her personality is negligible: she exists as the reader's self-insert, so her entire purpose is to be a blank slate. On the other hand, the ideal mafia male lead can possess a personality of some sort, but not one that escapes the tropes of these books. The commonalities across the board tend to be that he is satisfactorily broody, unhealthily possessive, extremely attractive, and unrealistically wealthy. Simply put, he needs to be the Alpha Male™ to our

female slice of Wonderbread. How the female character gets involved with our Alpha Mafioso varies from story to story. Perhaps she is kidnapped by the mafia to blackmail her family for... reasons. Perhaps she witnesses a crime the mafia committed. Or maybe the male lead just thought she was kinda hot. The possibilities are numerous, and the growing inanity of each iteration exponential. Whatever the reason, the female main character is taken from her Plain Jane world and thrust into the thrilling,



© Anna-Maria Sieklucka as Laura Biel in *365 Days*



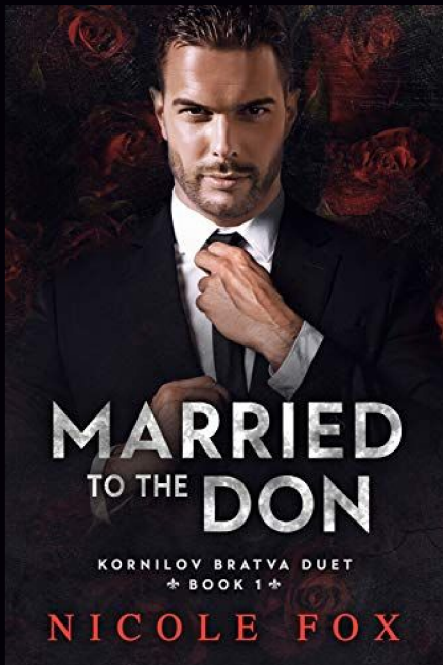
© James Cagney and Barbara Peyton in *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950)

dangerous world of the mafia, in which she meets her overprotective outlaw. Drama ensues. The male lead chases after his “goomar,” but pushes her away because he’s just too broken and evil for her sweet and innocent self. The male lead kills all her enemies, angering his lady love, and they split up. Eventually, the crooked capo wins her over, but messes up their reunion by doing something utterly unforeseeable, like another crime. She leaves him again, rinse and repeat. Sprinkle in some extra toxicity and an overabundance of intimate scenes, and you have a solid mafia romance.

Part of this genre’s popularity stems from the idea that the female main character can “fix” the Alpha Male™. He may be possessive, toxic, and will kill your entire family just to have you to himself... but you can change him! The appeal of a broken baddie is that you can put him back together like a jigsaw puzzle. Mafia romance is a genre that has plenty of these guys. Besides being able to repair your devious don, there’s something alluring about a felon boyfriend who hates everyone but you. After all, he chose you out of all the other girls who so desperately need him!



© Dakota Johnson and Jamie Dornan in *Fifty Shades Darker*



Indeed, the world’s obsession with mafia romance might just stem from our desire to feel recognized for our unique qualities. To read about a man who finds something so special about you despite how much he hates everyone and everything else offers the comfort and validation we need. Mafia romance fills that desire in so many readers who wish to be loved by an exciting person because secretly, something about them is exciting too. What adds to this comfort and intensifies mafia romance’s appeal is escapism. Everyone wants to leave their boring life for something thrilling. Your life becomes far more interesting when a criminal boss falls in love with you and everyone tries to kill you. Readers consume mafia romance by the dozen because it allows them to enter a compelling world unlike their own, with their own wildly impulsive (and steamy) romance.

So the next time you observe the denizens of Barnes & Noble consuming their fix of their malevolent miscreants, or spot a couple of old ladies sneakily reading their mafia melodramas in their lawn chairs, don’t judge them for their raunchy tastes. Instead, think about how mafia romance helps people find some extra joy in their daily lives. Even if that joy stems from perverted fantasies.

THE PARADOX OF CHOICE AND LACK OF STRONG, INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

BY SAHANA IYER

The greater the choices, the greater the freedom and satisfaction. At least, that is the popular belief (deriving from Western ideals of capitalism). However, in 2004, Barry Schwartz popularized the concept of “the paradox of choice.” His research led him to claim that an increase in options leads to a decrease in satisfaction. Stone Age Homo Sapiens arguably had fewer choices to decide upon (ex. should I eat the decent berries in the tree next to me or the far juicier bush berries some couple hundred meters from my current location?). Given only two options, it is easier to consider opportunity costs and satisfice. A modern-day consumer has a plethora of choices (should I get my berries from Target, Costco, Whole Foods, or the nearby farmer’s market? Should I get organic berries? What type of berries do I want? Should I get in a big box or a small box?).

The effort required to make decisions in the current environment has increased. With more choices, opportunity costs and regret are abundant. Furthermore, this overload of information (a consequence of the digital age) can lead to suboptimal choices (i.e., choices that do not “maximize fitness in the traditional sense”) and increase anxiety/mental distress.



One well-known evolutionary mismatch is the lack of strong, intimate relationships that seem to be prevalent in the modern era. Hunter-gatherers lived in a tight-knit tribal community; they formed close relationships with others in their tribe. It is important to note that they had limited options for whom they could befriend and mate (also close-knit relationships were critical for the survival of the body). In the digital age, making human connections is straightforward (through various social media apps, websites, etc.). People are also able to befriend and court others without physical contact. However, it appears that individuals are less committed than before due to the paradox of choice. If you could have the most perfect best friend and the most perfect romantic partner, you may not want to settle. In other words, you may think that there could always be someone better (given the amount of choices you have). Since it appears that there are always humans around to provide assistance/ to connect with, individuals postpone creating meaningful relationships or rather, are hesitant to. Much like shopping for a product, people shop for people. The amount of relationships people have has increased, but the quality of those relationships has decreased (leaving individuals feeling like their social needs have not been met). Generally speaking, while social relationships are no longer critical for the survival of the body, they are still critical for the survival of the mind.





Photo by Akansha Singh

ACRYLIC NAILS

for newbies



by aghaby gallab

Listen up, ladies! I get it; being a girl and wanting to get your nails done, along with your hair and lash extension, can really add up, and sometimes we just can't commit to all of it. Not to fear, help is here! Well, at least for one of them, nails! More specially, we'll be covering how to do acrylic nails. First and foremost, let's talk about products. This is the most important part and probably the most expensive. Although the products are expensive, they will save you a lot of money over time.

The five most expensive products are the electric nail drill, the acrylic powder or powders, a good Kolinsky brush, a UV lamp, and the nail monomer. Let's start with the nail drill. A good electric nail drill can range anywhere from \$60 to \$100. A brand I would recommend is MelodySusie. There are some adorable

nail drills that they sell that usually come with nail drill bits, which I will explain later on, and what they are used for. They last a really long time as long as you take care of them!

Next are acrylic powders, which can range between \$20 to \$60 depending on the brand. My most loved and well-used ones, personally, are the Valentino Pure Beauty acrylic powders. They come in a very wide variety of colors and nude base colors, and they also sell some in bundles. They also sell gel polishes, which are very pigmented! The gel polishes range between \$15 to \$25 per one, or you can buy these in bundles as well!

Next is a Kolinsky acrylic brush, and the reason I say Kolinsky is because these are the best brushes you can possibly get and are extremely high quality, which



means they will last you very long as long as you take care of them. An average brush can range between \$20 to \$60. They also come in different sizes; for starters, I recommend getting a smaller-sized brush, like a #6 brush, and using that until you feel more confident and comfortable with yourself, and then size up to maybe a #10 or even a #12 brush.

A UV lamp is to ensure you fully cure your acrylic and gel polishes, and this will ensure everything is fully cured otherwise, you'll have a goopy mess that you don't want, ladies! They can range from \$20 to \$40.

Lastly, the nail monomer. This is the purple liquid you see people use in salons to pick up the acrylic powder. However, most salons use MMA or Methyl methacrylate, which is ILLEGAL! The FDA banned the use of MMA in the 1970s. They only use it because it is significantly cheaper than EMA or Ethyl Methacrylate. Monomers can come in different sizes, from 8-ounce bottles to a gallon. Prices vary on brands, but good brands like Kiara Sky have EMA monomer, which can be between \$20 to \$45.

Now that we know all the products, getting started is quite easy! Make sure you set everything up, such as getting the acrylic powder opened up and having the monomer in a small cup ready. I recommend having some paper towels handy as well. First, ensure you have nail tips glued on and cut down to your desired length. If you have long nails and

want an overlay on your natural nails, that's fine too! Once all your nails are prepped and shaped to whatever shape you desire, you can gently dip your acrylic brush into your monomer (make sure you pour it in a cup you don't mind getting dirty). Once you dampen the brush, you can slowly start to slide it against the rim of the cup and strain some of the monomer out. Flip your brush over and use the other side of the brush to dip into your acrylic powder. Now you have your first acrylic bead! You'll have to practice to make sure that your powder and liquid ratio are good and trust me, it takes a while, but you'll eventually get the hang of it!

You can start applying acrylic to your nail tips and eventually build up your desired shape. Once you are done and cure it in your UV lamp fully, you can start taking your electric nail drill and file down anything that seems bulky or out of shape. I would recommend to use a lower speed, 5-10 RPM, first so you can get more comfortable with the drill and then adjust the speed as you go. Once you are done and you feel comfortable with your nails, you can design! Remember, harder designs take more time to master. There is always room for improvement and remember this as well, practice makes better, nothing is perfect on the first try but we can slowly build up from there! Things get better in time, ladies!



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Model: Ria Mehra



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ABSTRACTIONS

(how i meditate)

by aidan dyer

I have, in the last few years, become acutely aware of the fact that people like knowing things. If you bare with me here on this admittedly long winded article, perhaps I can share with you how I have radically changed my way of thinking. I will attempt to argue here that one should engage in radical acceptance of diversity (and maybe start meditating?!?).

Believing that one's self is knowledgeable on a topic can provide a feeling of purpose and understanding about the world which may give one a sense of security. But what if the world is more complex than any single perception can behold? I contend that it is. What if what one's perception of the world says just as much about them and their feelings as the world itself? And, for good measure, **what if challenging one's own interpretations of the world could cause huge personal anxiety?** Here, the carrot and stick are laid bare.

Abstractions are created whenever one removes characteristics from something in order to reduce it to its most important traits. Each word is an abstraction, an idea. In an attempt to understand the world, people simplify things for convenience and, often, for self preservation. Yet, these tools of convenience and comfort can often be the very things that block understanding and appreciation of the world. Further, one may feel personally attacked when assumptions, especially deeply held assumptions, are challenged. Therefore, many false, often **dehumanizing**, assumptions are left unchecked.

I claim that:

1. To create abstract categories (such as “good” and “bad”) and then fit things, characteristics, people, and anything else into them feels *good* for many because it gives them the feeling of understanding the universe.
 - a. In getting lost in good feeling abstraction, in the feeling that one understands the world, one loses the ability to truly appreciate and understand what they are experiencing outside of their world of labels and “understandings”. In this way, wonder is lost, but so is wisdom.

2. Language is just one prominent mode of reduction by categorization.

- a. How many times have I myself looked at a bush and thought, “It is but a bush”, and kept walking. But what do I know of bushes? What do I know of *that* bush specifically? Not much. Yet, the assumption of understanding is inherent in my label: “bush.” “I know what a bush is of course!” Think of the person who sees someone else and thinks “this is a girl” or “this is a boy” and assumes that they know much about that person based on these assumptions. In another scenario, a politician refers to a certain group as “animals”; This is an effective way to make listeners think of a group as having certain characteristics, even if the said listeners know nothing truly of that group (not to mention the fact that generalizations about groups, and the parameters needed to classify groups, are often inaccurate and arbitrary).
 - b. Language, by its very nature, can be a tool of **dehumanization**. A human being reduced to an abstraction. **Notice the mundanity of hugely hurtful ways of thinking.** A great raft of assumed understandings applies to any word.
3. Just because something feels good or right , it does not make it good or right! No! It, in fact, makes that thing, that good feeling thing, more dangerous as more people are willing to accept it with little scrutiny.
4. People often feel personally attacked by ideas (and therefore also lifestyles) and things that challenge their understanding of the world.
- a. The effects of contention 3 and 4 may be multiplied in social groups.

Indeed, one certainly knows less than they think they do on many topics. Yet often, too often, humans and societies act as if they know the absolute truth. In doing so, they hurt others and limit their own horizons of enjoyment and understanding.

So, if:

1. Humans seem to be largely driven by what feels safe, good, and convenient.
2. Humans tend to enjoy knowing things (Such as right and wrong) and dislike the unknown (Such as the question of why they were created).
3. Some belief being initially held or feeling good to hold, in fact does not lend it any extra credibility.
4. The mode by which an individual perceives the world and themselves, from the senses they experience to the language they think with, can never understand all things in this complex world, or all ways of perceiving, understanding, and existing.

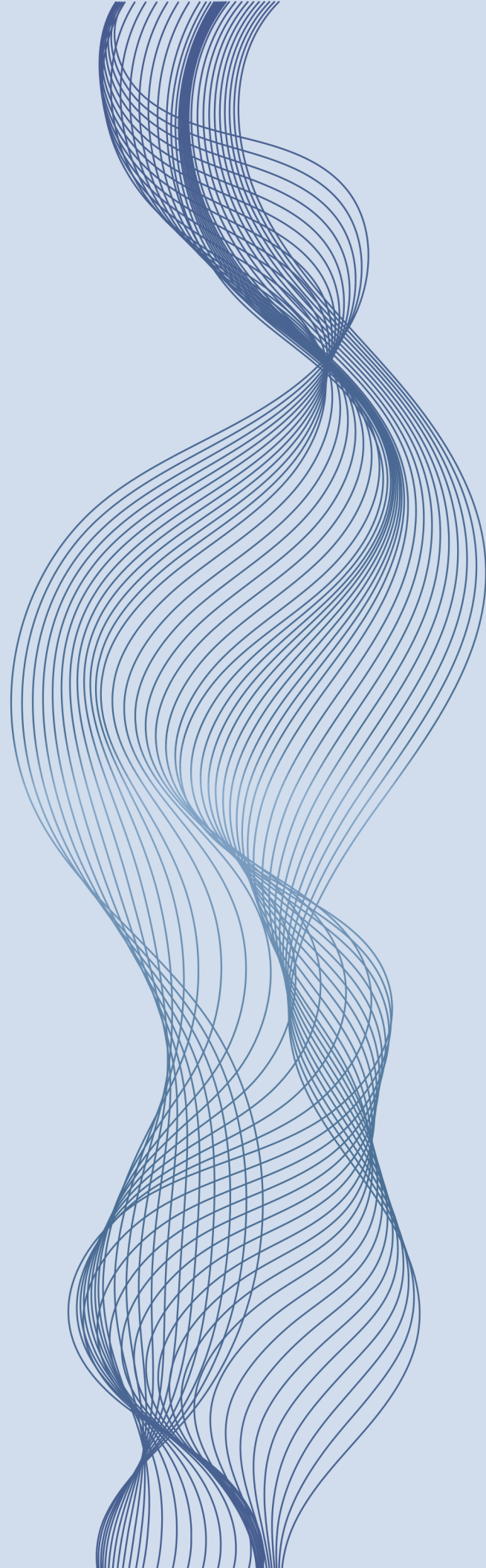
Then:

1. Individuals should stop forming opinions so quickly, stop forcing their “conscious” (AKA inherent moral beliefs that are not necessarily any more or less valid than any other beliefs except for the fact that they believe them) on other things (nature, people, systems, etc), and realize that radical acceptance of diversity, without looking down on others, could be a new, wonderful and frightening belief system (Religion!? Cult!? Are we starting a cult?). Perhaps this way of accepting things and challenging initial perceptions could shift an individual's consciousness over time. It has certainly shifted mine.

As I am writing this, just an hour or so before the deadline(144 minutes after the deadline now at the end of editing), my wonderful romantic partner, who is on the phone with me currently, is glowing. Glowing in so many ways beyond and through me. Are my assumptions about their personality a mode of boxing them in, lessening what they could be to me? To escape abstractions and ideas which are not reality, it is important to just accept the unique world around you, from the sounds to the people, without labels(such as “girlfriend”). One method I use is meditation: I close my eyes and listen. Accepting the sounds I hear without labeling them, I breathe, and perhaps I may come closer to spontaneity.

Questions I ask myself without even thinking:

What labels do I accept about myself? Have abstractions and expectations turned my life into a self-fulfilling prophecy? Why do I force others into categories? Is it to try to understand them? Am I selfish? What is wrong? Who is sinning?



poems by ally garcia

I am the sun

I may go down

But I will

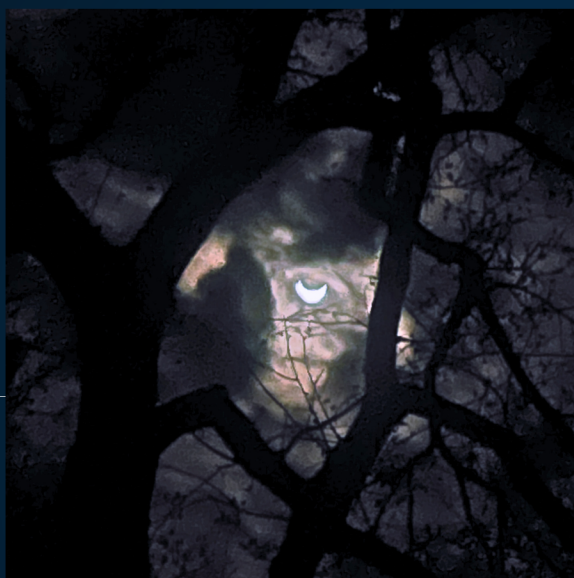
Always rise

I feel something

awakening

inside of me

2024 Solar Eclipse



Amber Safeer



Sahana Iyer



Srijan Agarwal



Alex Liu



Ali Ahmed
April 8th, 2024, 3:36PM
Plattsburgh, NY
Fujifilm X-T4, 80mm f/4 1/250 sec



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